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Pioneers of the West

A TRUE NARRATIVE

By

JOHN TURNER



CINCINNATI JENNINGS AND PYE
NEW YORK EATON AND MAINS

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Affectionately Dedicated
TO
EDGAR AND HIS MOTHER
AND
A LADY FRIEND

PREFACE



IN presenting this volume to the public, the author offers it as a simple tale of every-day life on the Western Plains, told in the simplest manner. And dealing, as it does, largely with scenes and incidents pertaining to the opening and building up of a new Western country, it necessarily contains considerable local historical matter. And the author has, at the same time, endeavored strictly to guard against making any statements not drawn from his personal knowledge and experience.

There is nothing fanciful or imaginary in the story. The narrative simply depicts some of the phases of frontier life necessarily involved in the settling up of a new Western country at the time of which it treats. And, although the author and his family are the chief actors, playing the principal parts in the actual life-drama, many phases of their experiences will apply equally to the early settlers in general. So, then, it is not fiction; but it is said that "truth is stranger than fiction."

The author has been questioned at various times, by persons living in other parts of our land, as well, also,

as those living in foreign countries, with regard to the customs out here in the "Wild West," as it is often put. They ask to know: "What kind of things are these dirt-houses? what do they look like? how are they built? the mode of living?" etc., and many other similar questions. And on one occasion the inquirer goes so far even as to ask, "What language do you use out there?" And this, too, from a person looked upon as being ordinarily intelligent, and known to be sincere. All this tends to show the ignorance that exists, especially in the extreme Eastern portion of our country, with regard to the West. Without any particular aim of the author to do so, but as a natural result, the narrative itself will explain many of these mysteries.

The reader will undoubtedly perceive, as he penetrates these pages, that the author has been frank and open in all his statements that pertain more especially to his own conduct of affairs, not in any way trying to cover up anything that might appeal unfavorably to the reader, and lead him to say, in many instances, perhaps: "If I had been in your place, I would n't have done as you did, but would have done so and so."

It hardly need be said, I think, that if the reader had been in the place of the author, he would have been the author himself, and the author, I suppose, would have been somebody else, and that he would have done, in every instance, as did the author. It is often said, "If I could live my life over again, how differently I would

do from what I have done!" But since we travel life's road only once, this is simply a useless and vain utterance.

"Come, gone—gone forever,
Gone as an unreturning river—
To-morrow, to-day, yesterday, never,
Gone, once for all!"

The author trusts that the work will be read with interest. It may be just possible, too, that a stray crumb may be discovered here and there, that, to pause for a moment and stoop to pick up, the reader may appropriate to his own benefit. There is one merit, if none other, which the story of a right claims—that of uncompromising truthfulness to portraiture. Its pictures are from life.

THE AUTHOR.

COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA, 1902.

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PIONEERS OF THE WEST

II

CHAPTER I

From the Old to the New; or, Good-bye to Mother-land.

IN order that the reader may have a clearer understanding of the narrative, let us go back to that bright and beautiful morning, the last in the month of June, 1871, when the narrator, with his wife and three small children, all boys, could be seen starting out from the Euston Station of the London and Northwestern Railway, bound for Liverpool. Passage had been previously secured, on the steamship *Java*, for America. We arrived at Liverpool about two o'clock in the afternoon.

The *Java* was registered to sail the next day for New York. Leaving my wife and children at the railway station, I went out to seek a place to stay till we went on board the great steamer the next day.

The next morning, before going on board, we experienced quite an excitement. We had been looking through one of the markets near by where we were staying. Every passageway was thronged with people, and it was no easy matter to make our way through the crowd; and in the jostling our oldest boy, eleven years old, was separated from us. Our consternation would be hard to imagine. My wife, turning to me with face deathly pale, and with trembling in her voice, exclaimed, "O, what shall we do?" For the moment I myself was confounded. Being an exceptionally bright and intelli-

gent boy, I was in no great fear but that he would know enough to make an effort to find his way back to our lodgings-place. But our chief anxiety was that the time at our disposal was so limited. In less than an hour we must be aboard the ship, or be left behind. It seemed almost a hopeless task to hunt for him in such a crowd. So, with only a momentary and unsuccessful glance here and there, we made haste back to our stopping-place, though with but faint hope of finding him there awaiting us. It was no surprise, therefore, when we found that he was not there. With the minutes left to us all the time growing less, there was no time for parley; so, leaving the other two children at the house, we hurried back again in search of the lost one. It is hardly possible to imagine our delight when we saw him emerging from the market-place, being almost carried along in the crowd. We were in no mood just then to scold, but only too glad to get back the lost boy, and so we hastened away.

Gathering up what things we had to carry, we made our way hurriedly down to the great landing. We got aboard the tender—the *Castille*—about twelve o'clock; but, being delayed for some reason, after waiting an hour and a half we steamed out, and soon came alongside the great, fine ship. In a little while the passengers were all on board, and for a couple of hours, in the steerage department, all was bustle and confusion. Bedding and other articles needed for the voyage were let down below, the steward being kept busy appointing to each his berth and giving instructions, being deluged, for the time being, with questions pertaining to the welfare of the passengers during the voyage.

In order to economize, I had secured passage in the

steerage department; but after becoming acquainted with the kind of accommodations, I felt that this was a mistake. And, to make matters worse, we were allotted a berth right under the bow of the ship, so that, by the pitching and heaving of the vessel, we experienced the full force of that dreadful seasickness-producing motion. In all, fourteen persons were crowded into the one berth we were assigned to, and there was no privacy.

Everything being in readiness, a little before six o'clock the engines were set in motion, and we at once realized that we were drifting away from home and native land. We were told that if we could get to sleep we would not as likely be affected with seasickness. Acting on this advice, we found our way into our bunks quite early. All went calmly and smoothly enough till we got out to open sea. Then the ship began to pitch and heave, and the advice given the evening before having proved unreliable, nearly all the passengers on board were affected, and the case of two or three became quite a serious matter, our oldest boy being one of them.

To a person not affected, but witnessing the effect upon others, the sight, though a pitiable one, could not be other than amusing. As soon as it began to get light, many could be seen, pale as death, staggering and reeling, and clutching to anything that afforded a hand-hold, making their way, as best they could, up onto the deck, to allow the effects of the sickness to have its free course, and to get the benefit of the fresh air. Others, too weak to make their way alone, but assisted by friends not so badly affected, were with difficulty enabled to ascend to the deck, whilst others were helpless, and unable to leave their berth, and the services of the doctor were called for. To experience a severe attack one feels that it would be

better to die than to live. The sensation can not be described. Our whole family experienced quite a serious time, the oldest boy especially, as I have said.

About mid-day on Sunday we entered Queenstown Harbor. Here we anchored, and remained about an hour, and took in first-class passengers and mail. As the vessel came to a stand the sickness, as if by magic, left every one, except the few whose cases were extreme, and all crowded the deck and appeared to be as lively as larks. We lay out some distance from the city, which, in the bright, glowing sunlight, presented a delightful picture—the distant part of the city rising to a considerable altitude, gradually sloping, in terraces, till it dipped the water's edge—and I fancied it to be the most picturesque city I had ever seen.

When all was again in readiness, we steamed out of the harbor; and the wind was against us nearly the whole of the voyage, so much as there was of it. It was cold, too, most of the time. As the vessel began to get up speed, she again commenced the same old motion of pitching, which soon had most of the passengers down again. Our whole family were so ill that we could eat scarcely anything for several days; even the sight of food, such as was served at our table, brought on vomiting. About the fifth day most of us were beginning to recover so as to be able to eat a little. The oldest boy, however, was still quite ill. The seventh day out we were still encountering rather a strong headwind, with dense fog that enshrouded the ship, so that an object only a few yards away could scarcely be seen. This necessitated an almost incessant blowing of the fog-horn, the weird sound of which it would be hard to forget.

One morning about four o'clock, after we had moved

out of the fog, the sky being beautifully bright and clear, the cry "Icebergs!" came ringing down the hatchway. Anxious to get a glimpse of them, I hurried on my clothes; and getting the oldest boy up, also—he was recovering a little now—we were quickly on deck. There were three of them—monsters; and to us who had never seen anything of the kind before, the spectacle was grand beyond description. In the distance they presented somewhat the appearance of old, ruined castles, or cathedrals, with their many rugged parapets and pointed spires. And as the sun was just peeping up over the horizon, the most gorgeous colors were reflected from the huge bodies of congealed water. One night, when the fog was on, we were in imminent peril of colliding with another ship, a large sailing vessel directly crossing our course. It being damp and cold from the fog, with a drizzling rain, nearly all the passengers were below at the time. Only three or four were on deck, and they huddled around the smokestack, a place always well patronized when the weather was misty and cold. The ship's mate told us, afterwards, that had the lookout been a minute later in discovering the situation, a collision could not possibly have been averted. Of course, it took only a few minutes for the report to spread amongst the passengers, and for a little while all was excitement. The incident was not soon forgotten, either, and for the rest of the evening it was the supreme topic for some pretty sober talk; and it did not die out entirely until we arrived at New York and the passengers dispersed to the four winds.

Our ship had no rolling motion, but, as I have said, pitched and heaved a good deal, one end of the vessel being away up in the air one minute, and then again dip

deep into the water, scooping it up and flooding the deck.

After getting out of the fog all was bright and clear, and we saw several ships, steamers and sailing vessels, passing and repassing. Our oldest boy, who was now getting back to his former life and vivacity, was here and there and everywhere, making friends with the sailors and others. He often amused himself by fastening a thread to an empty match-box, and, letting it down over the side of the ship, watched it as it skimmed along upon the smooth surface of the water. By frequent visits to the kitchen, he became quite familiar with the cook, and used to get some dainty pieces sometimes. His manner and disposition were such that he soon made acquaintances and became a favorite with everybody wherever he went. We could eat but little of the food furnished at our table, and, having heard quietly that we could obtain something more palatable and better suited to the weak condition of our internal organism, the opportunity was welcomed. These oft-repeated visits to the kitchen, however, made it necessary to unloose the strings of the pocketbook every time; for without that process nothing could be done.

The eleventh day out from Liverpool, just as darkness was closing in upon us, we caught a faint glimpse of land. Daylight the next morning found most of the passengers on deck, eagerly expecting, from what we had seen the night before, that we would soon reach the end of our voyage. Our great, fine ship moved along smoothly, and land was on either side. Some very stylish houses—wooden houses we called them—painted in various and gaudy colors, adorned the shores. Arriving in New York Harbor on the morning of the 12th day

of July, the ship was soon made fast by her anchor, and we were all summoned on deck to pass examination by the doctor, about which there was nothing painful, and it took but a short time.

The most exciting time had now arrived. The weather was exceedingly hot; the sun poured down its burning shafts upon us, and it seemed as though we would be roasted alive. The sailors were hauling up boxes, bales, and bundles of all shapes and sizes, the passengers all around, eagerly scrutinizing everything as it came up. It was a sight to see the whole deck, from fore to aft, strewn with this varied and queer assortment of freight. Some were loosening cords, others wrenching away to tear off boards, and others unlocking chests and boxes, so as to be ready for the examining officer.

After receiving a portion of our goods, and almost everything having been hauled up from below, I began to feel a little uneasy, for I found myself minus a large box which contained the more valuable of our possessions. Officers and men were so busy that they seemed not to have time to answer my inquiries. After a while, however, the mate informed me that nothing more would be taken out of the ship that day. "It is most likely," he said, "that your box is with the baggage of the cabin passengers, and you will have to wait till to-morrow morning, and go over to the ship, which will then be on the other side." This caused us delay and extra expense, as we were compelled to remain in New York till the evening of the next day. It appeared to me that the officers had suspicion that the box contained merchandise, and that it had been detained intentionally. Our vessel lay out some distance in the harbor, and we, with our luggage, were taken by the tender to the landing at

Castle Garden. Here was a large, circular-shaped building for the accommodation of immigrants. In the early days of the city the place was a fortified island a few feet from the mainland, but later it became a public hall for assemblies and concerts. Here it was that Jenny Lind, the great singer, known as the Swedish Nightingale, made her first appearance in America. Many years ago the island was incorporated with the general area by filling in the intervening space with earth and rock, and the place was used, as at the time of which I am speaking, for the purpose of landing steerage immigrants. A few years ago, however, in 1890, it ceased to be used for that purpose, and is now transformed into a public aquarium.

Here in this building was stationed what I choose to call a recorder. His duty was to register the names, etc., of immigrants. Here were also brokers, or money-changers, who made the place a perfect Babel with their shouting, and with whom we exchanged our English for American money. There were other officials also here in this building, but none except those having authority were allowed inside; so the place was free from a good deal of annoyance from hotel runners—touters, as they were called in England.

In writing to friends in England, in describing this class of persons in this country, and some others similarly occupied, I did not hesitate to put them down as perfect pests to travelers, especially to foreigners on their arrival in this country and unacquainted with the customs. At the railway stations they swarmed about us like bees. They attempted to seize our satchels or whatever we had in our possession, and almost compelled us, by force, to patronize them, whether we were needing such ac-

commodations or not. And, still more strange, they even went so far as to enter the railway cars, and that, too, before the trains were brought to a stand. We were amazed at seeing such things, and thought within ourselves: "If it is liberty that we are seeking, then surely we have found a place where there is more than enough to satisfy all our longings." But we soon discovered that the people of this country, accustomed to such loose and dangerous methods, seemed not to notice anything strange about it, but took it all in a matter-of-fact way.

As before stated, our arrival in New York was on the 12th day of July, the day on which a rather serious conflict, or riot, took place between the Orangemen and the Catholics.

As soon as we got outside of this large building, we at once came in contact with a whole pack of these men before referred to. One man, who came up to me, asked from what part of England we had come. I told him that we were from London. He then went on to tell that he, too, came from London, and as he made many statements which I knew to be correct, I arranged to go to his place. When we arrived there, we found that it was not a hotel, but simply a small, private house, a poor looking place, with but little furniture, and that of the commonest kind. But when we went to bed at night, and were trying hard to get a little rest, we discovered that we were favored with lots of company as bed-fellows. They were not large, certainly, and occupied but a small area in the bed, but seemed determined not to sleep themselves, nor let us sleep, either. They just persisted in roaming all over us, which kept us wriggling and twisting, rubbing and scratching, the whole night long. Whether our host shipped them with the rest of his bag-

gage when he said good-bye to London, we were too polite to inquire; but we recognized them to be the same kind of an animal that in England went by the name of "Lunnon Bug." This, I suppose, was the initiatory ceremony preparatory to that which was to follow, though with a different kind of animal, but still more tantalizing in its nature.

The thought had not entered our minds that, as a matter of course, we would be expected to share our bed with numerous other occupants; and had made no kind of calculation for being called upon to discharge the bill for the whole crew. But, being always of a peaceable turn of mind, and desiring to get along with all the rest of the world's inhabitants with as little friction as possible, we offered no protest, and, without uttering a word as to the discomfort of lying with several other families in addition to our own, all in one bed, we just let everything go, and paid the full charges.

CHAPTER II

On the Immigrant Trains

AFTER settling ourselves in our stopping-place, we sallied forth to inspect a small portion of the city. The fine buildings and broad streets, Broadway in particular, brought to our minds the sights we had just left behind. It was on this street where we met the soldiers marching from the scene of the riot; for we had heard that they had been called out to quell the disturbance.

Another strange thing, and exceedingly dangerous, as it appeared to us, was the railway-beds located and trains running in the open streets, with no barrier whatever against the dangers of accident.

Not designedly, but somehow in our rambles we found our way into some of the narrow and dirty streets down by the water, but remained there no longer than was necessary to find our way out. I will not take the time to describe them, for it would not make pleasant reading.

As we boarded the train just as the dusk of evening was gathering, and moved slowly along through the open streets and groups of little urchins flinging sand and dirt in at the open windows, all this was so strange to us that we began to wonder what kind of a country we had got into, after all.

Though hidden away from view of others, it would be no easy matter to describe the feelings to which one

may be susceptible when thousands of miles away from the old home and native land, and still drifting on; when the probabilities are that the back is turned toward the old home for all time, a feeling of sadness easily finds its way in. And so it was as we proceeded up the valley of the Hudson, till the morning light broke upon us, revealing the delightful scenery along the banks of the beautiful river, attracting our attention, and drawing our thoughts away from scenes and associations we had left behind.

Our first run carried us as far as Albany, where we arrived about seven o'clock the next morning. Of course, we knew not the difference; but we were put on an immigrant car, and traveled very slowly. Just before entering Buffalo, the train was run onto a siding, and we were kept there several hours, and did not move into the station till five o'clock in the morning. Here again we had to wait nearly the whole day for another train.

During our railroad trip, and particularly at this point, we were often not a little annoyed and puzzled. When information would be sought with regard to trains, in fact, in answer to almost any question, the invariable reply would be, "I guess so and so." Not being aware that this phrase "I guess" was prefixed, affixed, and fixed in every other conceivable way, almost, to any sentence, long or short, we would often say to ourselves, in rather a hasty manner perhaps, "Why, the people here in America never seem to be sure about anything!"

But "time works wonders," it is said. And so it would seem; for that which caused us so much annoyance thirty years ago soon became a part of our speech, and it would have been no easy matter to rid ourselves of the malady, if we had tried.

After waiting here eleven hours, not daring to leave the depot, as a train, so far as we could learn, might come in at any time, about four o'clock in the afternoon we were put on a train on the Erie Road. Arriving at Erie late at night, here again we had to wait several hours to make a change of cars. Whilst waiting here, we went out to make some little purchases and replenish the miniature pantry which we carried along in the shape of a fair-sized hand-satchel; for the next day was Sunday, and we supposed that we would be unable to make purchases at the "shops" that day, even if we had been so inclined.

We charged cars also at Cleveland and Toledo, being delayed at each place. At Cleveland, where we arrived Sunday morning about seven o'clock, we were compelled to remain all day and all night, although several trains passed through going west. I have thought many times since that we were purposely detained here simply for the money that might be drawn out of us. We were shown into quite a large wooden structure of one room, attached to the railway station, which extended out some distance over the water in the lake. This building, as it appeared to me, was intended for the accommodation of immigrants. No provision whatever was made for sleeping; but there was a bar in the room where drink and so-called refreshments were served. And, notwithstanding its being Sunday, the place was frequented all through the day and into the night by men from without coming in to get beer; there being no other travelers there but ourselves. A lot of disreputable-looking men were drinking and playing cards at three different tables nearly the whole of the time we were there, a sight most disgusting and degrading for even only decent people

to be compelled to look upon. It seems to me now, as I look back upon that scene, that it was the most miserable time we have ever had to endure.

We were told that our train would be along the next morning about five o'clock, and we were glad when the time arrived and we could get away from such a miserable and wicked place. We were up by four o'clock and ready to start on our journey, having slept none during the night; for we had stretched ourselves on some long forms that were in the room, and rested a little as best we could. But we were beginning to feel pretty well tired out, this being the fourth day since we got on the cars at New York, and having had no restful sleep since we went aboard the ship at Liverpool. On the morning of the seventh day from the time we started out from New York we arrived at St. Louis.

When within twenty-five or thirty miles of Alton, and just as daylight was coming, a most terrific thunder-storm burst upon us. The wind blew almost a hurricane, and it seemed as though the train would be blown from the track. The rain poured down in torrents, beating against the windows with such force that it seemed they would be smashed to atoms. The thunder and lightning were most violent, the whole atmosphere being so charged with electricity that it appeared almost a continuous blaze of fire. This being the first storm we had witnessed in this country, we thought it fearful; for we had never seen anything one-tenth as bad in England; so it seemed, at least.

Alighting from the train, we were transferred by 'bus to the ferryboat, the 'bus and we together, and thus crossed the "Father of Waters," and thence to the Union Pacific Depot.

Having no friends or any one whom we knew, we were a little puzzled to know what course to take. Having with us beds, bed-clothing, two large boxes, and other things, and expecting to stay in St. Louis, we sat some time in the waiting-room, contemplating. The thought of going to a hotel could not for a moment be entertained, so at last we concluded that it would be best to hire an unfurnished room. So, with this object in view, the oldest boy and I started out. Street after street were examined, but without success, and so we returned. Not favoring the idea of having to spend the night there, and longing for a place where we could get a little rest and sleep, my wife and I started out to make another tour of the streets. After considerable search, we succeeded in finding two rooms, the woman of the house refusing to let one without the other. The charges for rent, fifteen dollars, payable in advance, considering the locality and condition of the rooms, seemed exorbitant; but we paid the money, feeling that we had a place of shelter, if nothing more, for one month at least.

Hiring an expressman whom we saw on the street with an old, tumble-down, one-horse outfit, we went directly to the depot to get our few articles of house-furnishings. We found the boxes a good deal shattered, and the bundles of bedding loose and cords broken, and they had the appearance of having been dragged around in the mud. We managed to get the shattered parts together, and made off as quickly as possible to our rooms, not wanting to be seen by anybody. We soon had the beds spread on the floor, and were hoping to have a good night's rest. But here again we were doomed to disappointment. The weather being exceedingly hot—never having experienced anything like it in England—we could

bear no covering over us, and, notwithstanding the windows being all open, it seemed we would suffocate. We found, too, in the night, that the rooms were infested with insects, cockroaches and beetles crawling all over the room; and, worse than all else, that pest of all pests, the mosquito. The windows being open, these innocent-looking little creatures came trooping in, and, after we got to bed, we soon began rubbing and scratching. We wondered what it could be that was causing so much disturbance, so I got up and struck a light—a tallow candle stuck into a little, flat-bottom candlestick. After investigating a little, we all agreed that it was these exceedingly delicate little fellows that were the cause of all the trouble. Whatever of pleasure there might be in it for us, it must have been amusing could any one have witnessed the performance, going about the room with lighted candle in one hand, and with the other doing terrible execution whenever one of these intruders could be located. The children, as they lay rolling and kicking in almost a nude state, came in for an extra share of punishment. When one of these little creatures alighted on any part of their body, my open palm came down with a crashing report upon their bare parts, not only causing instant death in the one case, but a writhing and twisting in the other.

The extra expense on shipboard, and so much delay on the cars and in other ways, had carried our expenditure far beyond the calculations made before starting, in spite of the economy we were practicing. So, after resting a day, I went out to look for employment. It took but a short time to strike up an acquaintance with a few, and amongst them a gentleman by the name of Clark, an Englishman.

One day we were invited to take dinner with our new acquaintance, and I remember how queer it looked to see them take an ear in their fingers and gnaw the corn off the cob. But none of us could be persuaded to "try a little," as they said. Muskmelons, also, were brought on the table, and, although never having seen them before, we were induced to "try a little." It did n't look quite so much like eating horses' and pigs' food, we thought. We were a good deal amused seeing the Negroes sitting about the market, or on the sidewalks, with their heads buried in a half-section of a huge water-melon, trying to gnaw their way through and come out on the other side.

CHAPTER III

Still Westward—Into Nebraska

UP to the time of leaving London I held a position in a large piano and organ house as book-keeper, or clerk, as is the general term used there, and had the management of what was termed the outdoor tuning department. Professional men, mechanics, and others in England do not, or did not, at least, as in this country, change from one thing to another, so at first my attention was mainly given to that to which I had been accustomed; but, failing in that, I was ready to take almost anything that might offer itself.

Day after day I traversed the streets under the scorching sun, starting out in the morning, and making numerous calls at stores, offices, and other places; but to all my inquiries the invariable reply would be, "We have no opening now." All with whom I talked told me that they had not seen such hard times for many years; that there were thousands of clerks and others out of employment. About noon I would return and change my clothes, being as wet as a drowned rat with perspiration, and again made the rounds. "Is it really so," I thought to myself, "that there is no business being done?" Indications naturally point that way; for in front of stores and other business places could be seen men sitting on chairs or boxes, puffing a cigar, or with a jack-knife carving

away their seat from under them—so terribly strange to me that I could n't understand it, for I had never seen anything like that in my own country. "Or is this the custom?" I again asked myself.

After being in the city a couple of weeks, I happened down by the river one morning, and just then men were building the buttresses and piers for the great, fine bridge that was to span the river. Like many others, I stopped and leaned over the railing that ran along the side of the street. Whilst watching the men at work, a gentleman by my side turned to me, and said: "Are you looking for employment? I am in the tea business, and need some help." So I accompanied him to his "office," as he called it, a little bit of a room in one of the back alleys near by. I found the work to be putting up tea in small packages, and suited to a little girl or boy. Discovering, in our conversation, that I had a wife and two or three children, he said, "I guess you can't afford to work for the amount of wages that we're able to pay." I, too, guessed that the "guessing" in this instance came as near being correct as he could come to it; so I again went out onto the streets.

About this time, through the influence of an English gentleman, our oldest boy obtained a situation with the firm of Sumner & Company, a piano and sewing-machine house, as a kind of usher. Being a bright, intelligent boy, he seemed to compel every one, by his pleasing attractiveness, to take a liking to him; and, although so young, he could perform nicely on the piano, and obtained permission to practice on one of the pianos during the noon hour. It was only a few days when he was sent out to distant parts of the residence portion of the city to make collections of small accounts. At first he was

to receive two dollars a week—for catching flies, as he expressed it—but at the end of the first week his wages were raised.

After a few days, when we began to get a little acquainted with the people of the house, the woman would come to our room with some cooked white beans, or tomatoes, or something else that was quite new to us, for us to taste them. The first taste was usually more than enough. Hard, dry beans we had never seen used as an article of human food. So, like the corn, we found it hard to dispel the idea that they were too much like horses' food, and the stomach rebelled in taking part in the experiment, and some other way had to be discovered to dispose of them.

We attended church all the opportunity we had, on Sundays, going to different ones. At one little church, where we attended more than any other, on account of its nearness, we were impressed more by what we saw than with what we heard. And that which claimed so much of our attention was a spittoon, such as may be seen in saloons, offices, and other places, so common in this country. Well, this unique ornament of the church had its place close beside the pulpit, and the oft-repeated use made of it by the minister showed it to be an excellent servant in its place. But, bad as it might be to be compelled to wade through great splashes of filthy and disgusting tobacco juice on the sidewalks and other public places, such habits emanating from behind the pulpit of a minister of the gospel we could not comprehend.

We had been in the city nearly a month, with no more favorable outlook for the future than the past had been. Rent-day was near at hand, and it was plain that a change must soon be made. All going out, and none coming in,

accounts would n't balance up very evenly if continued at that rate very long.

Having obtained the address of I. N. Taylor, president of the State Board of Immigration, of Columbus, Platte County, Nebraska, I wrote to him. In reply to my letter, he advised that, if I could manage to get out there, to do so. From what he said, we were led to suppose that Columbus was a city of considerable size and importance. So, after thinking the matter over carefully, we seemed forced to the conclusion that the best thing to do would be to get out to Nebraska, and at once set about making arrangements for the journey.

Having got everything in readiness, I was in the office, and had just paid for my railway tickets, intending to start at five o'clock that evening, when Mr. Caddick, the English gentleman before mentioned, came running in. He appeared to take great interest in us, and tried hard to persuade us to stay; but, after having gone thus far, we could not see how we could change our plans. Accordingly, our minds being fully made up, we made extra exertion to get away on the evening train, and so reach our destination before Sunday. Just at the last, however, we were hardly pressed, and, with all our hurrying, we arrived at the station just in time to see the train move out. But there was no help for it then, so we had to wait till four o'clock the next morning, having to spend the night in the waiting-room. We could not lie down on the seats, they being divided into small spaces, with iron elbow rests. But having a bundle of quilts, these we spread on the floor in one corner of the room, and the children and their mother lay down on these; spending the night myself driving off the mosquitoes, which seemed as though they would devour them.

Under such conditions, it will easily be imagined that we were glad enough when morning came, though feeling in a worse condition to take the journey than we were the night before. On the way, we made changes at St. Joseph and Council Bluffs, thence ferried across the Missouri River to Omaha.

Omaha was but a small place in those days, its population numbering about 17,000, but now has become an important railroad center, and twelve years ago (1890) numbered a population of over 140,000.¹ At the time we came through, an iron bridge, spanning the river, was in course of erection.

We had now before us about one hundred miles more of travel before reaching our final destination. The Union Pacific Railroad had been opened through to the Pacific Coast only two years before. The road ran along the Platte Valley, and, for a good part of the way to Columbus, close alongside the river. The valley is very broad, being in places a good many miles across.

After a hot and dusty ride of two days, we arrived at Columbus, our destination. Who could imagine our surprise and utter disgust when we alighted from the train! Looking out over the few, scattered, wooden buildings, we felt that we would have given a hundred times more than we possessed if we could have boarded the first east-bound train that came along and returned again to St. Louis, or anywhere almost, to get away from this outlandish and wild-looking little place.

¹The recent census, taken in 1900, goes to show, that, for political purposes, these figures represent more, by many thousands, than was the actual population. It will be remembered that 1890 was the year of the Nebraska Amendment Campaign.

CHAPTER IV

Being Initiated—Our First Lesson in Roughing It

HOWEVER much disappointed we might be, we were not inclined to be despondent, but tried always to make the best of a bad job. I found Mr. Taylor's office across the track, directly opposite the depot; but he was away up in the western part of the country exploring. After a brief talk with his partner, Mr. Smith, who evidently was aware of our coming, I again went over to the depot, and returned with my wife and children. Mr. Smith then conducted us to an old, dilapidated, empty store building, which seemed to me to be about a hundred feet long. We made no objections, however, for we were glad enough to have almost any kind of a place where we might get a little quiet and rest. The weather being so very warm, we did not so much mind the many places where light and air found their way in quite freely. But O the mosquitoes!

There was a large, broken-down stove in the room, but we had no cooking utensils, save such as tin plates and cups that we used on board ship, and also knives and forks, spoons, and many other little things that we brought from England. There were also two old rickety carpenter's benches in the room, which we placed side by side for a bedstead for the whole family. We had one very large, heavy feather bed, and also what was called a flock bed.

Having had so little rest the past two months, we went to bed early, and rose late the next morning; for, being Sunday, I could not, of course, go out to seek for anything. We prepared our first Sunday morning meal the best way we could. Placing our tin cups, plates, etc., on a narrow board nailed to the side of the building, we ate our meal in that way. After breakfast, Edgar and I took a walk to see the extent of the place. We found, about a quarter of a mile or so further east, a few more buildings; some of them appeared old and weather-beaten. This was called the old town, and on the old trail, so were told, over which the Mormons traveled in going out to Salt Lake; and also the gold-seekers, on their way out to California, back in the forties. There were three small churches in the place—Methodist, Congregationalist, and Mormon. The Mormons were not polygamists, however, and there were only two or three families of them. Learning that Sunday-school was held in the Congregational church in the afternoon, the two oldest boys prepared themselves and went.

At the time we left London my wife was a member of the Congregational Church, where we all attended; but frequently went to other Churches also. Occasionally we would go to hear Newman Hall, Spurgeon, and other noted preachers; and especially, on winter evenings, we would sit under the great dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, with its hundreds of gas-jets far above and around the circle, sending their light down upon us, whilst the thunderous tones from the great organ seemed to make the massive structure tremble. But now, looking upon the Congregational Church as our home, as it were, it was only natural that we should first find our

way there. The little Church had been organized five years before, and was the eighth Congregational Church in Nebraska, then a Territory.

The two boys being quite neatly, and may be a little peculiarly dressed, being so recently from England, with their pleasing manner, attracted more than ordinary attention, especially from the minister's wife, and also the wife of Rev. Julius A. Reed. Mr. Reed had formerly been engaged as a home missionary, but was now in the banking business. After the school closed, the ladies wanted to know "whose two fine little gentlemen" they were, where they had come from, and many other particulars.

I was out early the next morning, and in a little while had visited all the stores and business places, but without success. As I left the different places the parting words would invariably be, "I guess you will be able to find something." But from past experience, that phrase, "I guess," had become so familiar and so meaningless that I failed to derive any encouragement or comfort from it. The next day a man who kept a ranch a little way out of town offered me a job at hauling hay, at fifty cents a load. I had never had anything whatever to do with horses, and knew nothing about such work from actual experience. But there seemed nothing else open to me, so I determined to try it. So I went out the next morning to the ranch, taking Edgar along with me. With the team and wagon, we followed the other men out to where the hay was. The hay being very long and coarse, and quite green, made it very heavy and hard to handle. The first day we managed to get in two loads, which made a dollar. That wasn't much

for both of us; but we stuck to it till I fell sick, and was in bed some days. I was so weak and helpless that when I did get up I could scarcely stand upon my feet.

Opposite to where we were staying was a lumber-yard, and a good many little odd pieces of wood were lying about, and which, by permission, the children gathered up, and with some of these I made a little wheelbarrow for the boys. Having an aptitude in the use of tools, and for mechanics generally, this wheelbarrow boasted of having a little style about it. At any rate, there was something about it that caused considerable attraction. Several times the boys were accosted, and asked, "Where did you get your wheelbarrow?" "Who made it?" "Is your father a carpenter?" The butcher, seeing the boys out with it one day, asked them if I could mend the seat of his buggy for him. "For," said he, "there are two carpenters here in the place, but I can't find anybody who seems capable of doing that little job for me." When the boys told me of it, I went and saw the man at his shop. And when he asked me if I could do the job, I knew that I could; but, to let him see that I was already somewhat of an American, I told him that "I guessed I could," and brought the seat away.

Having an old diamond glass-cutter, I did also a few little jobs mending windows. When in England, having an artistic taste, I used at spare times to amuse myself with photography; and when we came to this country I brought the camera and lens, and a few other articles, along, thinking perhaps they might some time be of service to me. We had been in the place only a short time, when, passing the photographer's one day, I looked in; he had only recently come into the place. After a little talk, during which he learned that I had a camera and

lens in my possession, he asked if I would let him take it and use it a little; "just to try it," he said. Not having any immediate use for it myself, I let him have it. That was the last I saw of it; for only a little while after that he very quietly and unceremoniously left the place, forgetting altogether to leave my property behind.

Though having always tried to observe that old adage, "Believe everybody honest till he proves the contrary," there have been a good many times since that day, when the temptation has come near capturing me, to set it down that he who first wrote that proverb didn't know what he was talking about, and put the cart before the horse; and that the whole thing ought to be turned completely around. But I am still trying hard to cling to the original.

About this time my wife caught a bad cold, and was brought down very ill with rheumatic fever. She had suffered previous attacks whilst in London, and had also suffered a good deal from her chest, and had received treatment at the hospitals; so that it could hardly be expected that she should be robust at any time. She was not able to leave her bed for some time, and for several days her case was quite critical. The place was hardly fit for a person in full vigor to stay in, much less a sick person; for the nights were now getting quite cold, and in many places the wind and rain found their way in freely.

One day, when she began to grow stronger, we were all invited over to the minister's, to take dinner and spend the rest of the day there. Mr. and Mrs. Reed also lived in the same house, and boarded with the minister and his family. In the afternoon a gentleman, a ranchman and Indian trader, came to the house to see me.

He owned a ranch twenty miles or so to the west, adjoining the Pawnee Indian Reservation. Some one must have spoken to him about me, for, after a little talk, he told me that he was in need of some one to take charge of his store, and asked me if I would take the position. He seemed very anxious, and even suggested that he take the whole family out there at once. But meeting with so much disappointment thus far, I thought it best to go out first and see for myself. There happened to be another man in town who was going out that evening; so, after talking the matter over with my wife, we decided that I should go out that evening.

The man's name was Stevens, and he had come from Iowa, I believe, and was looking for Government land. When we were ready to start, another man, named Cross, got into the buggy also; and he, too, was "hunting" for land. The sun had hidden herself away an hour before we started out, and darkness grew on us apace. We had gone only a little way when the night began to grow cold, and the wind blew quite briskly. After traveling a few miles, it grew very dark, and we got off the track. The driver got down and grouped around with his hands, trying to find the road. Getting back, we drove on till we came to a small stream, called Looking-glass Creek, a tributary of the Loup River. This we crossed, and, in going up the bank on the opposite side, again got off the track. Once more we succeeded in getting onto the road, and on we went again. This was repeated three or four times, and once the buggy came near capsizing and spilling us all out. We traveled on again for a few miles without interruption. But our misadventures were not all over yet, for, by and by, we found that the horses' heads were actually turned toward the direction

from which we had come! Incredible as it may seem to some, to any who have had experience in traveling on the open prairies at night, especially in a new country, it will not be at all strange. So the driver stopped the horses, and we held a brief council together; and for the fourth time Mr. Stevens had to get down and hunt up the road. He seemed a good deal puzzled this time, and it was quite a long while before he could satisfy himself as to the direction to take. But, after some delay, we started on again, and, without any further mishap, reached the end of our journey about midnight.

The folks at the ranch were all in bed when we arrived, but we did not disturb them, but put the horses in the barn, and we all went up into the hayloft. There was no floor in the loft, simply a board laid down loosely here and there—enough to keep the hay from falling through. Having no lantern, one of the men struck a match—a thing I would hardly risk under any circumstances—which only afforded a flash of light. Not being safe to grope around in the dark in search of hay to make some sort of a bed, I wrapped my overcoat about me, and lay down on the bare boards; my head and shoulders on one board, body across another, and legs still across another, with my feet sticking out over the edge. The night was cold, and it began to rain, and to think of getting any sleep under such conditions was altogether out of the question. I shivered all through the night—or morning, rather—and was anxious for daylight to come.

CHAPTER V

Among the Red Men

THE experiences of the night before had not prepared me to welcome with delight everything of whatever sort that might come along. So when I got up from my bed of slats in the morning, and looked out on the surroundings, the disgust that I felt at the sight can better be imagined than told. Across the yard was the little bit of a store building. Near to this were three or four little old log-cabins. The house, in the same group, was also built of logs, and was the largest of the buildings. Never having seen anything like them before, that such buildings could really be intended as habitations for civilized people seemed almost incredible. But when we went into the house to get breakfast, I was almost astonished to meet Mrs. Platte, an educated, refined Christian lady; quite a wide difference in appearance and manner to that of her husband. Although a log house, it was not in the same dilapidated condition as the other buildings were. Before taking breakfast, however, I went into the store, and had a little talk with the man in attendance; and by what I learned from him, if I had gone in he would have had to go out. Whilst talking with the man, several Indians came in, and in their efforts to barter dried buffalo meat, dressed robes, etc., for sugar and coffee and other articles, it was amusing to hear them talk. In their conversation they seemed to talk as much by signs as by word of mouth.

The impression received from what I saw of them did not in any way prompt a desire to associate with them as every-day companions, so I declined the invitation. Only the first glance was enough to impress me that the Pawnee Indians were a dirty race, not only in regard to their personal appearance, but also in their habits. A better acquaintance with them in after years fully corroborated this first impression. Except a blanket cast about them, some of them were almost naked. Some of them wore moccasins made of rawhide, ornamented with beads, and a few of the squaws, as well as the bucks, wore buckskin pants, with a fringe down the side like those of the cowboys. From the appearance of their dress it would be hard in some instances to distinguish the men from the women. Having a great liking for bright, gaudy colors, their blankets were almost invariably of a red color, and they decked themselves with ornaments of various kinds—earrings, necklaces, bracelets, etc. The hair of the women, which grew low down on the forehead, hung as straight as a stick about their neck and shoulders, almost hiding their faces. As to their food! Well, there seemed nothing in the way of animal food too far advanced in a state of decomposition, if it would still hang together, for them to eat. They could often be seen carrying away offal—intestines and other internal parts of animals that had been slaughtered—from the slaughter-house at Columbus. It used to be said that they simply emptied them of their contents, and without further cleansing, cooked and ate them. At first I was a little skeptical, but after seeing what I did, I thought then that I had no longer any right to doubt.

One day when Edgar and I were passing along, we came up to an Indian camp, pitched on the prairie by

the side of the road, and they appeared to be having an easy time. One squaw was combing the hair of another; not, however, for making a clean and neat appearance, judging from the toilet they usually presented. One evidently had been operated upon, and now the other was taking her turn. During the performance, she picked the vermin from the head of the other and put them into her mouth, and, as we supposed, was making a meal of them. So I thought then, if they would go so far as that, they would n't balk at anything. And, by the way they kept themselves, one would imagine that they would be almost alive with vermin. Stewed dog meat was very much in favor with them, especially on festive occasions. But what else there was other than the skin and bones, with which to flavor the soup, it would be hard to imagine, judging from the goodly number of lank curs that usually accompanied them—and no less smoky and dirty looking than themselves.

About a mile and a half or so to the northwest of the Platte ranch was the Indian Agency. Having learned that the mail-carrier, "Old Mike Welsh," would leave there that morning for Columbus, I made up my mind to walk out there, and get a ride into town. On the road I met a number of Indians scattered along, sometimes men, sometimes women and children, all of them scrutinizing me very closely as we passed. Some of the squaws had their papooses at their back; some carried them on a wooden frame, with a strap of buckskin across their foreheads; others had theirs in a kind of bag or pouch formed with a blanket.

As soon as I reached the Agency, I hunted up Old Mike; but, to my surprise and disappointment, only to be told that he had not an inch of room that he could

spare for me. But not being inclined to give up at trifles, I made up my mind to foot it. But before starting out, I spent a little time looking about the place; for being right in the midst of an Indian settlement was so novel a thing for me that I could n't help being interested in the surroundings.

The first thing that attracted my attention was the schoolhouse, a plain but quite large brick and stone structure, where the Indian children were being educated. The school was in charge of Mrs. Platte, the lady I had a little while before taken breakfast with in the log house at the ranch. Just a little west of this building, on the opposite side, was the Government trading-post. Opposite this was the agent's cottage; also that of the interpreter, the doctor, and one or two others. There was also another building, used as a boarding-house for the men who worked about the place. In later years we called this building the "hotel," and made it a stopping-place when on the road. As they farmed considerable land, several men were employed—some Indians and some whites—and were well provided with barns, corncribs, horses and mules, wagons, and all necessary kinds of farming implements and machinery. And as the Government furnished all these, there was no stint. A little to the south, at the mouth of Beaver Creek, there was also a flourmill. Once a month, on their pay-day, the Indians received from the Government beef and other provisions, and clothing, besides money. The clothing consisted chiefly of blankets and cheap colored calico goods. These they would often barter away for other articles. A short distance to the south was the Indian village. Numerous wigwams or tepees were scattered about. The atmosphere that morning being very clear,

with the smoke leisurely ascending in wreaths out of the tops of the queer-looking little abodes, the scene was quite picturesque. These tepees were constructed in different ways, though usually of the same form. Poles were set up in the ground, forming a circle, and brought together at the top, thus making a frame conical in shape. A small opening was left at the top for the smoke to pass out. Hay or brush, or other similar material, was then packed around on the outside and covered with earth. Sometimes the framework was covered with tanned hides, sometimes with canvas. And it was such as these last that they used when moving from place to place, trapping, etc. Some could be seen almost any time with long, slender poles strapped to their ponies, some on each side, with the ends extending away out in front and behind, and the canvas rolled up and strapped on their backs.

After this hasty survey, I set out on the road; and, by taking a more northerly route, I escaped wading the creek which we had forded the night before. There were but few houses on the way—a log or a sod house here and another there. When about eight or ten miles out my course led me through what is called a "dog-town," inhabited by prairie-dogs. The color of these exceedingly cute little animals is a reddish gray, each hair being red, tipped with white. They have short ears and tail, and have shallow cheek-pouches, in which they carry out the dirt in burrowing the holes in which they live. These pudgy little fellows could be seen by the hundred, sitting upon their hind legs, uttering their peculiar, harsh, barking noise—something like a young puppy. They are as quick as a flash, and if a person should make a motion to go towards them, with a flourish

of the tail, they would dive into their holes so suddenly that it would be difficult to shoot them. Rattlesnakes are quite numerous in these dog-towns; prairie-dogs, rattlesnakes, weasels, and owls all living together in these holes, one happy family. Happy, I said, but that is not so; for not only do these several intruders make free use of the cozy abode these industrious little creatures have labored so hard to provide for themselves, but they oftentimes feast upon their young; and it could hardly be expected that happiness would reign supreme while such a performance was going on.

The sun was now getting up pretty well overhead, and was very warm; and, becoming lame in one knee, it was all that I could do to make the last three or four miles. Not finding any one at our place of abode when I reached home in the evening, I went over to the minister's house, and found my wife and children still there.

There being no bakery in the place, we had a terrible experience learning how to make bread. Our first experiment would have afforded great amusement for all except ourselves; but just about that time we did n't feel much like being amused in that way. After the loaves came out of the oven and cooled off, they were a facsimile of the same amount of baked putty, in color and solidity. No fear of that bread crumbling or not keeping! Many times afterwards, when speaking of that experience, the boys would say, "You might kick that bread from here to New York, and it would n't break a bit!"

A few days after returning from the Platte ranch, I was told that the county clerk might perhaps be in need of help in his office. So I went down to the court-house and saw Mr. Hudson in his office. When I told him what I was looking for, "Yes," said he, "I have

no deputy, and find it necessary now and then to have a little help; but have so recently had the assistance needed that everything is now posted up to date." Mr. Hudson, familiarly called "Elder Hudson," was the preacher at the little Mormon chapel, and he and his wife and family, with a few relatives, were the little band of Mormons that some years before were driven off the reservation by the Pawnees. I learned that they were English people, coming from London to this country.

Fourteen years before, when Platte County was first organized, there were only thirty-five persons in the county. Mrs. Hudson used to relate to us the way they were treated by the Indians, and finally driven out altogether. She would tell how, when those tall, bony, repulsive-looking bucks would come to the house and be so annoying and insolent, she had used a whip to drive them away.

The Indians made not the least ado about walking into a house, uninvited, and helping themselves to a chair; and about all that could be got out of them was, "How! how!" spoken in a low, gutteral tone, more like the grunt of a pig than anything else. Being the most persistent beggars imaginable, it seemed almost impossible to get them out of the house without giving them something, or driving them out. To set a dog on them—if you happened to have one—was about as effective a way as any. They were terribly averse to having the "blacksnake"—a very long, heavy, flexible whip, such as was used in driving oxen—applied about their legs.

A few days after this, Mr. Reed, the banker, took me over and introduced me to J. P. Becker—"Pete," as everybody called him—who kept a general merchandise store; also handled agricultural implements, bought and

sold grain, etc. Mr. Becker said to me: "I'm behind with my books, and would like to have them straightened out; but a large preponderance of my patrons are Germans and of other nationalities [himself being a German], and being the owners of some very long, crack-jaw names, these, I fear, would trouble you somewhat, and retard the work." I told him, however, that I was not much afraid of that; so he said, "Well, go ahead and try it."

The accounts were in bad shape, and a long way behind, and the task was no easy one, after all. I worked away quite hard for a month before bringing everything up to date.

About three weeks prior to this, Edgar procured a place in a little grocery store close by, kept by "Will" Rickley, and received five dollars a month. After I had straightened Mr. Becker's accounts, I remained in the store, keeping the books and filling in my time with other work as occasion needed—serving customers, working over butter, making bad butter into good butter—or at least changing the name; loading cars with grain, potatoes, or whatever it might be; handling plows and other implements, and doing a hundred and one things that usually comes in the way of running a store and carrying all kinds of goods in a new Western town.

I had been at work about a month, and the nights were now getting so cold that it was unsafe to stay longer in our present abode in its extremely airy condition. There was no vacant house to be had of any kind, but we managed to procure a room in a house occupied by another family; a small room with a very low ceiling—the kitchen. For this little bit of a room we paid seven dollars a month; and being exposed to the north, it was almost as cold as an icehouse.

At first we purchased only such things as were actually necessary to get along with—a stove, with cooking utensils; a bedstead, table, and four chairs; all common and plain, but away up in price, for all that. I could get no money in payment for my wages, but was compelled to take it out in goods at the store. The stove and other articles were obtained through an order on other stores; the same being the case with furniture, boots and shoes, and clothing. At one time I had even to obtain postage stamps in that way, in order that I might send letters to friends in England. About all the cash I received during my five or six months in the store was when I filed homestead papers on a quarter section of Government land. Fortunately for me, perhaps, that the Government of these great United States of America was not indebted to the storekeeper, or I would have stood an excellent chance of being loaded down with an order and sent off to Washington, with instructions to present the document to "Uncle Sam." This means no reflection on Mr. Becker, for this method of doing business seemed to be the common custom. Doubtless there were many debts gathered in in that way that otherwise would never have been collected at all. But never having heard, even, of any such custom in England, I preferred to be given what legitimately belonged to me, and so be enabled to use it in my own way; to make purchases of such articles as I most needed, and at such places as might best suit me. Which privilege—or right, rather—one was often deprived of under this "order system."

Winter weather set in quite early, the second week in November, and it was quite severe. In an old letter

written to friends in England, dated March 13, 1872, I find this statement: "On the 12th November, I think it was, we had a terrific snowstorm, the wind driving the snow so furiously that a person could see only a few feet ahead. The snow that fell then, with much more added to it, is still on the ground. We have had three or four such storms during the winter. We have had a hard time of it, the room we live in is so intensely cold. The wind seems to blow right through these wooden houses. The weather has been much more severe this winter than for many years. The oldest settlers here say they have never experienced such a winter before."

Of course, we had to have fuel, and being offered a load of wood for five dollars, and thinking that wood would be less expensive than coal, I gave the order. But when it was delivered, I found it to be long poles, trees, and had to be sawed and split. And, worse than all, it was nothing but green cottonwood, just felled. It can be those only who have been compelled to burn green cotton-wood in the dead of winter that can form the least idea of the "great time" we had. We kept the oven full all the time baking wood, as well as having it stacked up behind the stove nearly to the ceiling. With a continual hissing and sputtering of sap and steam oozing from the ends of every stick in the oven, as well as that in the grate, one would almost imagine himself in the boiler-house of some factory. We would all huddle around the stove as close as possible; for, with a full draught on all the time, one might place his hand upon the stove with but little fear of being dangerously burned. The room was damp all the time, on account

of the steam, and the smell was almost unbearable. At night we made use of every bit of bed covering that we had, besides coats, and anything else that could be made to stay on the bed. Covering up our heads entirely, the sheets and blankets would be all wet from our breathing, so that when we got up in the morning they would be frozen stiff.

CHAPTER VI

The Last Stage—Into Boone County

BEING pretty well assured that my services at the store would not be needed very long, on the 17th day of October I "took out" declaration or first naturalization papers, and at the same time filed papers on one hundred and sixty acres of Government land under the homestead laws, in a county just newly organized, called Boone County. No white man had visited this new country till this year; that is, with a view of making permanent settlement.

Being away all day at the store, and the two oldest boys being at school, my wife and the youngest child were left alone, and the Indians would come to the house and give them a terrible scare sometimes; and, as I said before, they would open the door, walk right in, fill their pipes, and puff away as leisurely as you please. And they would not be persuaded to go away without giving them something. This occurred two or three times, when one day a young man who lived with the people in the other part of the house happened to be at home. So my wife, all in a tremble with fear, went to their rooms and told the woman that there were Indians in our room. Presently the woman came in, followed by the young man—a big, burly fellow, and as strong as a young elephant—carrying a whip in his hand. It was not, however, the much-dreaded "blacksnake," but a common

driving whip, with a rather long lash. But in the hands of John Liscoe it proved just as effective as a "black-snake." However much fun there was in it for those who witnessed the performance, to see those rawbone bucks, as soon as they caught sight of that whip, leap from their chairs and shoot out at the door, and to see the capers they cut as the long lash fell thick and fast about their lower extremities, evidently must have been anything but fun for them. He did not stop with the first charge, either, but kept up the assault, routing the enemy and driving him out onto the prairie.

One would suppose that such apparently unfriendly treatment would cure them of making these oft-repeated visits, especially when the men would be at home; but they seemed to forget all about it, and would be around again in a day or two. After that my wife kept the door locked whilst the rest of us were away. But still they would come, and try hard to get in. One day she was stooping down looking over some things in a large box close under the window. All at once the window became darkened, and looking up, there stood a great giant of an Indian looking down upon her, his huge form nearly covering the window. He made signs, and grunted out something that she, of course, could not understand. Being scared almost out of her wits, she snatched the child to her and crept away into one corner out of sight, and there remained till she felt sure that he had left the house.

It was just at this time that the awful news reached the little town of the terrible fire then raging in Chicago. Although hundreds of miles away, everybody was filled with intense excitement; for a few days there seemed little else talked about. Men, what few there were, gath-

ered in little groups on the street and in the stores, and soberly discussed the awful situation; whilst at the same time the fierce gale was driving the flames and licking up block after block, till eighteen thousand houses, covering an area of more than two thousand acres, were laid in ashes. Two hundred persons perished, and nearly one hundred thousand more were rendered homeless; the property burned being estimated at two hundred million dollars.

At the same time came also the news of the great forest fires raging up in the North, laying waste thousands of acres and inflicting terrible loss on the settlers, besides the loss of many lives.

As my wife had been a member of the Congregational Church in London, she entered the little Church of that denomination soon after our arrival in Columbus. We all attended the Church and Sunday-school regularly. Although always attending religious services in England, I had never identified myself with any Church as a member. I used somehow to have the idea, like many others, that I could live as near right outside of the Church as in it. But since coming to this country everything had become changed, and altogether different from what I had purposed in my mind. The difficulties that stood in the way, and obstacles that presented themselves at almost every turn, appeared so formidable that I seemed forced to think more seriously than I had ever done before, and to realize more clearly how dependent I was on some power other than my own, and that I could do little or nothing simply of myself. And so I made public confession, as well as profession, right there in the little church, to be a follower of Jesus Christ, and was admitted into the Church. Already the duties of

secretary and librarian of the Sunday-school had been laid upon me, though I knew nothing practically about what those duties were; for I had not attended Sunday-school since I was a little boy only eight or nine years old. Nearly all the people in the little village in which I was born and reared worked in the paper-mills, and the proprietors of the mills, in many ways, manifested a good deal of interest in the moral, and spiritual welfare, too, of their employees. A Sunday-school—so we called it, at least—was conducted in a room of one of the mills, all amongst the machinery and other material. All that we did was to make an attempt to read the Bible, each scholar in turn standing up and blundering through a verse the best way he could. This continued for an hour or more. No questions were asked, and no instruction given; but when a verse was committed to memory a small “reward” card was given. I remember very well, the teacher of the class to which I belonged was a man about forty years old; and when a boy happened to strike a word that was too much for him—which occurred quite often—he would stop, and wait for the teacher to pronounce it for him. But almost invariably it was quite as much, or more, of a puzzle for the teacher than the scholar. After an almost inaudible mumbling of something that nobody could understand, he would say, “Go on!” When this was over, we would march in procession along the country lanes to the church, nearly two miles away, to sit and listen—what time we were not asleep—to a service from an hour and a half to two hours long. At Christmas time we used to think more of the school on our return from Church than at any other time; for that was the time when we were given our annual Christmas treat—great

joints of roast beef, and monster plum puddings, almost black with fruit, brandy, or old ale. These were always accompanied with mugs of beer, and served in the club-room of one of the public-houses of the village, known by the sign of the "Three Tuns." What would be thought of it in these days, a Sunday-school being entertained in the back room of a saloon! After the feast was over, and the weather happened to be severe enough to form ice strong enough to "bear up," we would go "sliding" on the little horse-ponds and ditches of the neighborhood. That was all the experience I ever had in Sunday-school work.

Our younger boy—only a child, of course—was quite a singer. And when in Sunday-school, the minister's wife, who was both superintendent and organist, would come to his mother and ask, "Where is my little songster?" Then she would take the child up to the organ, and have him sing before the whole school. One of his favorite pieces was "How I love thee, sparkling water!" Having a strong voice, he did not fail to make the best use of it, showing not the least embarrassment.

Speaking of Church and Sunday-school brings to my mind the fact that my first experience with prairie-fires was on a Sunday evening. Late in March, I think it was, we were in Church attending service, when a fire came sweeping down over the prairies from the north upon the little town. Of course, this being the first time I had ever seen anything of the kind, I was not aware of the danger. I noticed, however, there appeared to be a good deal of uneasiness amongst the little congregation. Presently, about midway in the sermon, the minister stopped suddenly, and asked the people if they thought there was any danger. And a young man,

"Coon" Darling, rose and said, "The head-fire is sweeping directly down upon us, and if we're going to do anything, we'll have to be quick about it." Without another word, the congregation were asked to rise, the benediction pronounced, and in a few moments all had disappeared from the little church. Many made directly for the scene of the fire, which was making its way into the newer part of the town, whilst some went to their homes to get something to fight the fire with. Not knowing anything about the method of fighting prairie-fires, but hearing others as they ran hither and thither, shouting one to another, I ran home and snatched up a pair of old pants, and hastened on with the rest. All the people in the little village were out in full force. The fire had made its way almost into the town before it could be checked, coming close around some of the barns and houses, making it necessary to move wood-piles and other loose material that was lying scattered about. It was lively and exciting work for a time, and this being my first trial, I think I performed my part fairly well.

The winter being so severe, and not being accustomed to such weather in England, it went a little hard with us. And about this time I was brought down with malaria, and for two weeks was so weak and helpless that I could scarcely stand upon my feet. So when I gained sufficient strength to go back to the store, I was not much surprised when told that my services were no longer needed, there being four other men in the store besides myself. But as the time was so near at hand for us to move onto the claim, I thought it not worth while my seeking other employment.

A young man from London, who had followed

close in our wake to this country, and had also filed papers on land adjoining mine, came out to us at this time. And after spending a day or two preparing door and window frames for a sod house I was intending to build on the homestead, on the morning of April 10th we set out to locate and build our future home—our friend, our oldest boy, and myself; for as yet we had not seen the land.

A man named Thompson happened just then to be hauling some goods up into the new country, so we hired him to carry our outfit, and provisions also, we ourselves walking most of the way. After passing the Pawnee Agency we made slow progress, there being simply a faint wagon track over the prairie, and it was late at night when we came up to a little shanty in Beaver valley, close by the creek. The little settlement had already taken to itself the name of "Hardy," that being the name of one of the first settlers; but it was soon changed, or some parties tried to change it, to Waterville. Afterwards, however, a little town sprang up known as St. Edwards. Here at this little shanty we staid all night. And as Mr. Thompson was not going any further, we stowed our things away under the shelter of an open shed built of poles and old hay. Having yet twelve or fourteen miles to go, we set out afoot, and along toward evening came upon two or three small wooden buildings. In one of these lived a settler named Hammond. Evidently the man's chief ambition was that, in some mysterious way, perhaps, a little town might some day spring up and grow on his claim, with his ten by twelve feet board shanty as a starter, and he had therefore named it after himself. The other little shanty of the same size close by, on the adjoining claim, was

occupied by a middle-aged woman named Rice. Her son also had a claim near by. The third building, which was put up by the business men of Columbus for the temporary use of new settlers, was a little larger than the other two. In this little building, which was first called the "Frontier House," and afterwards the "hotel," was held the first county election. The commissioners also met there to do what little business there was to be done. In fact, it was a place for all meetings of whatever kind. Across the creek lived one of the first settlers, named Dresser, in a small dugout, where, we were told, just such stragglers as ourselves could be accommodated with something to eat; so we at once made our way over there. It being the time for supper, we sat at the table with the family, consisting of Mr. Dresser, his wife, and three girls. Of course, with a family of five persons all in one room, and that only a hole dug in the ground, we might almost say, we could not expect to find accommodations for sleeping. We had, however, brought along two or three comforters, so we spread them on the ground in one corner of the stable—also a dugout—and had for our companions that night two horses and a cow. I did not sleep any, however, for the cow and I were in too close company to be agreeable to my delicate taste, there being no barrier between us.

The morning light brought with it a delightfully clear sky, which, when the sun came up over the hills, fairly glowed again. And, although not having slept a wink, I felt it a relief, as soon as light came, to vacate the space I had occupied, so that the cow might not be so cramped for room, and get myself out into the open. As I stood there listening to the hooting and cooing of the prairie-chickens away off in the hills, the sound was

peculiarly charming to me; and in after years it was always a sure indication of the near approach of spring. Edgar and our companion seemed perfectly content with their situation for a couple of hours yet. Our friend was one of that kind who, it mattered not what or where the situation, could drop down—or stand up, for that matter—and in five minutes be as sound asleep as a spinning-top. If the cow should take advantage of the full length of her rope and tramp around on him just a little, I don't think it would have disturbed him any.

Having had breakfast, Mr. Dresser accompanied us to point out to us our claims, which to the nearest point was a mile up the little valley; and which we there and then christened "Pleasant Valley." Mr. Dresser went back home, and we, after tramping back and forth over the land to find the corners, set out over the prairie in a northwesterly direction on an exploring expedition. It was supposed that there was no timber anywhere within many miles; but we had been told, the night before, that some men in their rambles had discovered, about six or seven miles to the northwest, a small body of oak, which, if true, would be a great boon to the few settlers. We tramped and tramped the whole day long, wearying ourselves out, but discovered nothing. The prairie had recently been burnt over, and the stubby tufts wore holes through our shoes. On our return, we did not stop at the dugout, but made directly for the little wooden building, the "Hotel," across the creek. Nobody was actually making their residence there—three or four men batching together till shelter of some kind could be provided on their own claims, that's all. Here we found three single young men, and a married man named Boardman, from New York City or Brooklyn.

As their custom seemed to be to have all things common, we at once joined their ranks. Our supper that night was made up of the renowned "bachelor's" corn-meal flapjacks, fried bacon, coffee, and a little thick, very black-looking molasses. My friend and I not being far enough advanced in the art of pancake making—not of that kind, at least—were not allowed to have a hand in their preparation. Of course, everything in the way of eating utensils consisted of tinware.

At night we spread our blankets, buffalo robes, or whatever we had, and all made our bed on the floor, covering up all the space in the little room.

Though few as were the settlers, these men had formed themselves into a literary society, "Lyceum," they called it, holding their meetings weekly. The program consisted of recitations, readings, debates, etc. Our first night with them happened to be the time for their meeting. There were two others besides us who were staying in the place, Hank and Need Myers, nine of us in all. Hank was the presiding officer that evening, and read selections from a written weekly paper. It may be well, perhaps, that I have made no effort to retain in my memory the items contained in that paper, for they would be too funny to be repeated after all these years; but still, it seemed to afford a little pleasure, and helped to pass away the time with less danger to moral character, perhaps, than might have been the case with some other forms of amusement.

Having no inclination to be idling away our time, we began, next morning, to look about to find some way to get our things brought up from the place where we had left them. Learning that one of the batching party had a span of mules, we made a trade with him, he hauling

our things whilst we went to work on his claim, making a large excavation to build a dugout. The same night, Mr. Boardman returned with our things. We had brought along several dozen eggs in a box, but, on opening it, we found that nearly all of them were missing; and, for the want of knowing what else better to call it, we said they had been stolen. This, however, was no surprise, considering the exposed situation in which the things had been left.

CHAPTER VII

Nebraska Marble and Sod Houses

BEFORE proceeding further, and for the information of any who have not had occasion to make use of the homestead law, it may be well, perhaps, to mention some of the provisions contained in the law to be complied with in order that a clear title be obtained at the expiration of five years. The fee, altogether, was eighteen dollars, fourteen dollars being paid when making the application, and the balance when final proof is made. From the date of the first papers, six months were allowed wherein to make improvements; but on or before the expiration of that time it was necessary to be on the land, and make it a permanent residence for five years from the date of the first papers. Any time two years thereafter proofs could be made as to the fulfillment of the conditions of the law, and, if found satisfactory, on the testimony of two other witnesses, a patent would be issued by the Government.

In many instances the improvements were very meager, and often unavoidably so; for what could a man do, supposing he had a wife and family to care for, and no means of support, and no team nor implements of any kind to work with?

Land could also be obtained under what was called the pre-emption law. Under this law a quarter section of land could be secured by payment of two hundred dol-

lars—a dollar and a quarter an acre. The pre-emptor was required to get onto the land within thirty days from the date of filing application papers, build a house, and make other improvements, and live on it continuously for six months.

Still another way of procuring land was through the timber culture law. Lands secured under this statute were commonly called "timber claims." The fee was the same as that for homesteads. A good many years ago, at the time I took my homestead, and for some time afterwards, the law required that forty acres be planted to trees, and the trees cultivated and kept in growing condition for eight years. At the end of that time, proof as to the work having been done in accordance with the provisions of the law, a patent was issued, as in the case of homesteads. Now, to be required to break and prepare forty acres of raw prairie, plant it with trees, cultivate and keep in good growing condition on a drought-stricken, grasshopper-devoured Nebraska prairie for the long term of eight years, and at the end of that time leave a large percentage of the many thousand trees planted in a "healthy and growing condition," to any one knowing anything at all about the enormous amount of labor necessary, and the difficulties in the way, at that time, at any rate, of growing trees successfully on the Western prairies, it will plainly appear how utterly unreasonable were these requirements. I believe that it might be said, without doubt, that not one out of fifty who did prove up under this law, if even one did, fulfilled its conditions. Doubtless, many put more than the amount of hard labor into it that was necessary to comply with the law; but, on account of the conditions, at the expiration of the eight long years the trees could not

be found, although replanted and "filled in" time and time again, perhaps. No doubt the Government discovered its mistake, for some years afterward the law was amended so as to make the number of acres ten instead of forty. And still later other concessions were made, till finally both the timber culture and pre-emption laws were rescinded, and withdrawn entirely. This was a wise course, and ought to have been taken long before. These claims have been used, in a very large majority of cases, as any one who knows anything about it must be aware, more for speculation than anything else. Very few indeed of the timber claims, as well as pre-emptions, especially in the extreme western part of the State, have remained in the hands of the original owners; or, more correctly speaking, the owners of the right; but they have passed into the hands of speculators and great ranchmen, who are in a position better able to hold them at their pleasure, looking for paying returns some day from the small capital invested. No doubt that, in consequence of the enactment of these two laws, there are thousands of acres of land in Nebraska alone, held by the parties mentioned, that ought to have been reserved as homesteads for the thousands who may yet need them.

Having learned a little of what is demanded by the Government in order that we may become proprietors of a minute portion of the great United States, let us now see what we did faithfully to perform our part of the contract.

The next morning, after unloading our stuff on the sloping bank of a ravine near to where we intended to build the house, we at once set to work building a temporary cabin, by digging a hole six feet square in the rather steep land on the opposite side. Happening to find

a few sticks which had been killed out by prairie fires, these we set up in front and across the top, and then dug clods of sod and piled them up against them and over the roof, thinking perhaps that almost any kind of shelter would do until we could get the house built. We did our cooking outside, gipsy fashion.

Before we proceeded to build, and that the reader may have a clearer idea of the work as it progressed, let me explain briefly the method adopted in the construction of a sod house.

First, then, of course, after plowing the sod, about three inches thick, say, which was done with an ordinary breaking plow, was to cut it into the required length. As the walls usually were built three feet in width, a twelve-inch sod, as we called it, had, of course, to be cut two feet in length. In laying the sod, open spaces were left for doors and windows, the frames being built in as the walls went up. When the foundation had been laid, the order of laying the next course was reversed. This reversal process was repeated with every course till the walls had reached the desired height. At the proper height spaces were left for the windows, and the frames built in, as in the case of the door frames. When the walls were up to about the thickness of a couple of sod above the frames, lintels were then laid across, and the sod laid over them, continuing the wall right through. The vacant space over the frames was necessary on account of the walls settling so much, that process going on for years, perhaps. Old rags, or an old gunny bag, was usually stuffed into the open space, and a portion of it removed, as occasion required. When the walls were high enough, about six or seven feet usually, the gable-ends were then built up, a few inches or a foot higher,

for, to prevent the dirt from washing off, as much as possible, by heavy rains, the roof was made almost flat. It was the general custom to trim down the surface of the walls with a sharp spade after they were up; but it was invariably the rule with me to trim each course as I laid it, thus giving a better chance to keep them up straight. We used to shave off the top surface of each course with a sharp hoe, filling in the cracks and openings between each sod.

The walls being completed, we are now ready for the ridge-pole, usually a tree from ten to fifteen inches through at the larger end, and as near the same size the whole length as was possible to find one. Sometimes the bark was stripped off; for the wood lasted much longer that way, as well as having a cleaner and neater appearance. Raising the pole into position was done by rolling it upon skids, and necessitated the help of several of the neighbors. Skids were placed with one end resting on the edge of the wall, and the lower end extending away out on the ground. Some stood on top of the walls, and pulled on the ropes, and others, on the ground, lifted and pushed on the pole from below. Of course, there were other ways in which many of these things were done, depending on circumstances. Next came the rafters, poles from four to six inches through, and placed about fifteen inches apart. Over these was laid willow brush, and this again covered with a good quantity of hay, and finally, dirt piled on to the depth of six or eight inches. The plaster for the inside of the walls was composed of about one-third part clay and two of sand. Two coats were put on usually. With the walls trimmed down tolerably smooth, and a little care in putting on the plaster a smooth, hard surface could be made, and wall-

paper could be put on about as neatly as on the plastered walls of a frame or brick building. Of course, it would not bear getting wet, and it was often washed off by the rain coming through the roof. Many of the houses, however, were never plastered, and few had floors in them in the early days. The ground usually was the floor, and the door and window frames were hewn out of the scrubby timber that could be found anywhere.

In making a dugout, all the difference in that and building a house was that an excavation was dug into a bank, and walls built up in front, and also on the sloping banks at the sides, and the roof put on.

Great difficulty was experienced by the settlers in procuring timber for building purposes and for fuel. At the first there were a few trees in a cañon on the creek, but they all soon disappeared. After that the little patch of oak of which I have already spoken was discovered. But settlers came from long distances from adjoining counties, and it was but a little while before this also was all cleaned out, brush and all, and even the roots grubbed out. After that, some ventured onto the Indian reservation, twenty-five or thirty miles away, and occasionally came in rather dangerous conflict with the Indians. Having in some way procured the necessary timber, and the sod plowed—"Nebraska marble," as it was called—we are now ready to begin building.

Every sod house consisted of only one room, but once in a while could be seen a curtain stretched across the room, thus affording some little privacy. So I laid my plans for putting up a house of three rooms, making the partition walls of sod, but not so thick as the outer walls—a thing that I have never seen in any other house. The house, being eighteen feet wide and twenty-two feet in

length inside, required an enormous amount of sod; and, having no team nor wagon of any kind, and feeling the need of going to as little expense as possible, we carried all the sod in our arms. And, on that account, we had the sod plowed as near to the "building spot" as possible; but, being on the level prairie, it was exceedingly poor material. It will be seen, therefore, that we had no small job on our hands. We started in, however, our friend and I, nothing daunted. Day after day we toiled on, Edgar helping in whatever way he could. I laid all the sod myself, and, when I would catch up and run out of sod, I would help carry in more. At the close of the first day, having worked like beavers, the progress that we had made was but little more than perceptible. After cooking and eating our supper, we spread our blankets on the floor of our six feet square cabin, and lay down to rest; not, however, before bowing our heads in prayer in acknowledgment of blessings bestowed through the day, and asking for a continuance of God's protecting care through the night.

Day after day for more than three weeks we labored steadily on. During the fourth week two men came along, one named Francisco, and the other named Kepfer. They had come up from the "Elkhorn," they said, from near Bell Creek, in Washington County, which place was afterwards known as Arlington. They were looking for homesteads. As we were at work, they came to us and made inquiries about the land, etc. But, having so recently come into the new country ourselves, however strong the desire to have neighbors right away, we felt that we had no right to tell them that it was the most productive soil and the best country anywhere in all this broad land, so were able to answer only a few of their

queries. This, it would seem, ought to have been proof enough for them that we were yet quite green and had not been long in this country. However, Mr. Francisco filed papers on a quarter section adjoining my own, and the other man filed on a claim three or four miles to the southeast. As these men intended staying in the neighborhood a few days, I arranged with them to take their team and go down with me to the cañon and get a load of poles for the house. For this service I helped to build a house for each of these men. Mr. Francisco wanted his built, he said, in the same style I was building mine, except that there was to be only one room, and a much smaller house.

CHAPTER VIII

Driven from a Hole in the Ground

IT seemed that we were doomed not to get along far with our plans before being interrupted and delayed in the completion of the house. After working right along every day for more than three weeks, word came that the owner of the house in which we lived wanted immediate possession of it. This, of course, made it necessary for me to go at once to Columbus and get the family and goods away.

Hiram Rice, a young man whose name has been mentioned before, having a team, I arranged with him to drive down and get the goods, our friend and I going along also. Mr. Kingham—that being the man's name—did not return with us, however; for just at that time a new bridge was being built across the river south of Columbus, and he went to work on that. Reaching Columbus on Wednesday night, most of the next day was spent in arranging what things we had and loading them on the wagon, so as to get an early start the following morning; but, for some reason, the driver could not start out till the day after, Saturday. Altogether, we had quite a big load for such a small team; for they were nothing but ponies. Traveling slowly, we reached the Indian Agency at Genoa in the evening, and staid there that night. While here, a little incident happened which has been the occasion for talk and laughter many a time since.

A settler from Boone County, whose name was Moore, was returning from Columbus, and happened to be staying at the place. He was the owner of a very dark complexion and striking features. And on Sunday morning, when we were in the hallway, all of a sudden our second oldest boy, Ernest, looked straight up into the man's face, and exclaimed, "Hello, squaw!" For the moment the man seemed to put on a confused look, but just as quickly it gave place to a very broad smile. The children were always taught to behave exactly the contrary to that, and, of course, his mother and I were much annoyed at such conduct, and administered a rather sharp reproof. I met Mr. Moore a good many times after that, but never, I think, without that event being mentioned, and followed by a hearty laugh. The boy, no doubt, felt fully satisfied that he was an Indian, and might on that account, perhaps, be allowed a little more liberty, thinking that an Indian was not entitled to the same consideration as a white man; but, when going still further, and addressing him as "squaw," that, we thought, was getting beyond all bounds. The boys were not only taught to treat everybody, no matter what their condition or color, with due respect, but also politely.

I regret to record it, that, although it was Sunday, we proceeded on our journey. Under the circumstances, it seemed to us then that we were helpless to do otherwise, being in the hands of the driver. We got along well enough till we came up to Beaver Creek; but here we encountered quite a little delay. The crossing was bad, the descent being very abrupt; it would not have been at all safe for my wife and children to attempt to cross over on the load. But there was a sod house a little way off, where lived a man named Baldwin. So

the driver went over and got the loan of an empty wagon, and so took the folks across in that. Having again hitched the horses to the wagon, we both mounted, and slowly and cautiously began to make the descent. But, being perched away up on top of the goods, we were unable to use the brake, and descended into the stream with a rush. The goods swayed to and fro, and it was no easy matter that we clung to our places. Soon after we crossed the creek, Mr. Moore caught up to us; and, having only an empty wagon, took my wife and children with him, and they staid at his house till we came up. We had no mishap after this, but moved on slowly, and reached Hammond just as the sun was seeking a hiding-place behind the hills in the west. And so the Sabbath ended; but not as we would have had it, for we felt ill at ease over the day's proceedings. That night we staid in the little frame building.

Hard as may have been the struggle up to this time, the difficulties of procuring food, even, now became more formidable. Everything, whether agreeable or not, was done under a system of reciprocity—you work for me, and I'll work for you, seemed to be the only compensation for anything one did. So the outlook was by no means a bright one. But still, it was not allowed to trouble us, perhaps, as it might many others similarly situated. Or we may have been too proud, as people sometimes call it, to let it be seen of others; not much doubt but there may have been a good deal in that. So the next morning, Hiram and I hauled the things up onto the claim, my wife and children walking up later in the day. After passing Dresser's dugout, there was not even a track to be seen on the prairie. I had previously inquired of Mr. Dresser if there would be any danger from

heavy rains by making our hut in the bank of the ravine, and he said he thought there would n't be any danger at all. Being guided by what he said, we unloaded our goods on the sloping bank opposite the cabin, where it would hardly be thought, even if there should come a heavy rain, that the water would rise high enough to do any damage. We packed the things altogether in a pile. There was the large barrel containing the salt pork, nearly the whole of two small pigs, about two hundred pounds or more. I had taken these, as I had other things, out of the store, and credited them on my wage account. There were also two bedsteads, table, chairs, stove, boxes, cooking utensils, and several things, besides beds and bed-clothing. Over them all I spread a large felt carpet—one that we brought from England—and fastened them with a rope; and fortunately we did. Soon my wife and children came along, and, as soon as we had got things a little in shape, Edgar and I went up to renew our work on the house. It was about seven hundred and fifty yards away, and directly north. The walls now being up to a considerable height, and being deprived of the assistance of our friend, the work, which at the first seemed as hard and difficult as could well be, became now still more so. The sod had been gathered up all around nearest the building, and now we had to go to the farther end of the breaking, which was several rods away. Of course, with the help of a boy only twelve years old, I had much the greater part of the work to do myself. The sod, too, having been so long plowed, was dry and crumbling. To be sure, we had now the little wheelbarrow that I had made for the children, but that, of course, was not intended for heavy work like that, and we dared not carry more than two or three sods at a time.

We were permitted to work only a part of two days in this fashion; for along in the afternoon, about four o'clock, of the second day, a terrific thunder-storm broke suddenly over us. The thunder and lightning were truly awful, and the rain seemed almost to pour out of the heavens. Edgar described the rain as "myriads of cotton threads, almost in mass, hung in a wavy form from the clouds." We crouched under the walls, trying to shelter ourselves, but in a few seconds we were soaked clear through. Ernest happened to be with us at the time, and his mother and Leonard, the youngest child, were down in the cabin alone. But, thinking perhaps that the storm would soon be over, I told Edgar to run down and see how his mother and Leonard were faring. He had been gone only a few minutes, when I looked out, with the expectation that if anything was wrong, he would signal me. But not seeing nor hearing him, I returned again inside the walls. Presently I looked again, and this time I heard a shrill, piercing whistle. Of course, I knew at once that there was danger ahead, and, like a hunted stag, I dashed through the beating rain, which seemed now to pour down harder than ever. He had now come onto the top of the bank, and was whistling and shouting with all his might, and waving his hands. Ernest followed me as best he could, whilst I ran on with all the speed I could muster.

I tried always to deal with a critical situation with all the calmness I could command; but when I arrived at the ravine, and saw the awful peril in which they were, and began to realize the terrible consequence of only a few moments' longer delay, I confess that I was a little scared. There must assuredly have been a cloudburst in the vicinity, for never, in all the years that followed, when

during some great storm the lower lands were inundated, has there been one-fifth the water coursing down this tributary ravine as was rushing down it at this time. Just a little below the cabin this emptied into what we called the big ravine, that ran the whole length of the valley, originating in numerous heads in the hills several miles north, and finally making its way into the creek a mile and a quarter below.

As soon as I got to the ravine, I dashed into the water, and crossed to the other side. In the hurry and excitement I never knew how Ernest managed to cross; for I had forgotten all about him, and was thinking only of the other two. In making the attempt, it is a wonder that he was not swept off his feet and carried down by the onrushing current. I could n't very well get to the cabin from the side we were on, the banks being very abrupt and deep just at that point; but on the other side the banks made a gradual slope; and it was on this side where all our things were standing. And besides, I could see at the first glance that we would be compelled to call for help, and there was not a single settler north of us; neither on the east nor west. It was all-important, therefore, that we be on that side, otherwise we would be cut off from communication:

On the doors that we had laid down for a floor was a flock-bed, and some quilts and blankets pushed up to one side. On these the child and his mother were sitting, she holding a frying-pan over his head to protect him from the water pouring through the slight covering overhead. The storm still continued to rage, even with more fury than before, and the water rising rapidly every moment; and the doors, not being fastened down, were borne up and floated on the water. Higher and

higher the two caged birds were lifted till their heads almost touched the roof.

After crossing the ravine, I ran down opposite the cabin, and again plunged into the water, which was now as wide as the creek into which it emptied, the force of the current being so great it was with difficulty that I kept on my feet. Having reached the cabin, I snatched up the child, and managed to get across and set him down on the other side. But now came the greater and more difficult task. But there was no time to think about difficulties or hard tasks, or to devise plans. With no signs of the storm abating, and the water all the time rising rapidly, every moment's delay increased the difficulty and added to the danger of the situation already so serious. So, immediately on freeing myself of my first load, I turned and again plunged into the turbulent current. I managed to reach the cabin without any mishap; but, in attempting to use the same method with my wife as that adopted with the child—that of taking her up in my arms and carrying her across—I made an utter failure. Close in front of the cabin the water was quite deep, the earth having been washed away, and as I took my wife in my arms—in rather a clumsy fashion, perhaps—and started to carry her, I stepped into this hole, or washout, and lost my balance. This, with the water lashing so furiously about me, caused me to stumble, and, to save both from falling flat into the water, I was forced to let go my hold, and down went my wife. I held fast to her dress, however, and we scrambled and struggled through to the other side the best way we could.

During this time the two boys stood on the bank anxiously watching and waiting to see what the result would be. But, seeing now that their mother was safe,

Edgar, although so young, was as fearless as a young lion, and set right to work trying to rescue different articles as they were drifting away. Besides many little things that we had in the cabin, though small as the space was, other things that were lying outside were being carried away by the swift current. A number of things had already gone, and others were going. The little stock of groceries, and other provisions, all the except the pork barrel, that we had brought along, were swept away. As the different articles were being carried down, I would take hold of Edgar's hand, and hang on to him like a leech, and let him go out into the stream as far as we dared venture, and try to hook a rake into the things as they drifted by. Once I plunged in with the hope of rescuing a new hat that my wife had brought from London, and which she had never worn, but failed in the attempt. I held on to a small branch of a tree growing on the bank, but the force of the water was so strong that it broke away with me. If once anything was carried into the big ravine, there was no longer any chance of its rescue. All this time my wife stood on the bank sheltering the child as best she could from the beating storm by wrapping her dress about him, whilst the rain beat down upon her own poor bare head unmercifully. Meanwhile, the lightning and thunder kept up almost a continuous flash and roll, and she an incessant pleading with God that the storm might be abated.

The boxes and other things that were standing in a heap on the sloping bank were partially under water; but nothing could be done with them then. So when we saw that we could do nothing more to save the things that were floating away, and as the storm now began to subside, we sent Edgar down to see "Hi" Rice, the young

man who had hauled our things onto the place only the morning before, and get him to come up with his team and wagon and take us downtown, or somewhere, we knew not where. You see, we had already begun to call the one little lone building a town, though nothing indicated that such a thing would be planted and grow there. We knew not what to do, for every thread of clothing had long since been soaked through and through. I was in great fear as to the exposure of my wife to the storm, together with the excitement, especially on account of her frail health.

After going only a short distance, and coming onto the lower lands of the valley, Edgar found it flooded all across, and had to go in a round-about way up over the hills. All this time my wife was standing shivering in her wet clothes, and it was getting dark when we heard the rumbling of the wagon in the valley below, and in a short time they drove up. We left everything just as they were; for there seemed nothing that we could do; and, considering the sad plight we were in, we thought it more prudent to be looking after our physical well-being. Hiram suggested that we go to his mother's place; but, strangers as we were, it seemed to us that it would be an intrusion. But in the extremely uncomfortable situation in which we found ourselves, we had but little choice in the matter. So he took us to his mother's house, which, as I have stated before, was only a very small place indeed.

Mrs. Rice was very kind, and did everything she could to make things as comfortable for us as possible. Her first thought was to provide a change of dress for my wife. For myself, some things of Hiram's were hunted

up; but, having no small children of her own, the boys could not be provided with things exactly adapted to their needs, so were wrapped about with anything that would serve for a covering till their clothes could be dried. A big, roaring fire in the stove was soon doing its share of the good work, as our clothes were hung up all around to dry. It needed no very acute observer to detect at a glance that arrangements had been made between Hiram and his mother before he left home that we should be taken there. They had already eaten their supper, and still there was a newly-prepared meal ready to be placed on the table. We did not remain up long after supper. Our hostess very kindly shared her bed with my wife, and the best provision that could be made for the rest of us was by placing blankets and other things on the floor, which covered all the space in the little room.

In speaking of a cloudburst, one writer says: "The most destructive form of mountain storm is the so-called cloudburst, when the rippling brook suddenly becomes a roaring river, carrying death and destruction in its path. The noise made by the cloudburst has no parallel. Above the rumble and roar of masses of rushing water is heard a grinding, groaning sound of falling trees, of slipping earth, and rolling boulders, while the banks of the stream, far above the danger-line, tremble as if in an earthquake. The senses are numbed by the awful cataclysm, and it seems to the spectator, although he is on the high banks and out of danger, as if the very foundations of the earth had burst and judgment-day had come. The flood tosses about mighty trees and rocks as if they were straws, the banks of the stream seem to dissolve before his eyes, and

a feeling of awe at the irresistible power of Nature steals over the observer. Once witnessed, a cloudburst is never forgotten."

Another writer, commenting on the above, says: "In point of fact, however, there is no such thing as the bursting of a cloud. The term 'cloudburst' is a convenient expression by which the result of a very heavy rain is designated. Nearly all the surface of the mountain region is made up either of rocks or adobe soil. The latter, in most cases, has never been broken to cultivation, and is almost impervious to a sudden downpour of rain. The consequence is that the mountains are cut up with arroyos, gullies, and water-courses, and, in the course of unnumbered ages, into mighty cañons which astound the tourist. In an unusually heavy rainfall, the great mass of water, spread over a large area, instead of sinking into the ground, is quickly accumulated in the beds of the streams, which rise many feet in a short time. When this accumulation is rapid enough, and the 'lay of the land' is just right, the water rushes down the bed of the stream in a solid wall, and is called a cloudburst."

The same fact would apply, if not equally, to a very large degree, to a prairie country, where little, if any, of the surface has been broken up and cultivated, as was the case with us at this time. This would account for the solid wall, as spoken of, and which we have seen rushing down the "big" ravine four or five feet high, sometimes flooding the little valley.

CHAPTER IX

Gathering up the Wreckage and Another Catastrophe

WAS the terrible experience that we had just passed through only a foretaste of all else that was to follow in our life on the prairie? we began to ask ourselves. But it would not do to foster feelings of that nature, and become despondent, and be always weighed down by a dread of something that might happen, and yet might never happen; so we would rather not think about it. But for all that, the next morning we felt compelled to resort to some pretty sober and serious thinking, for it seemed evident that some new course must be pursued.

There was the small room in the "hotel," which had been occupied by S. D. Avery, who seemed to be trying to do a little in the way of locating new settlers, making out "filing papers," etc. So we decided to get some of the things brought back from the claim, and occupy this little room till we could finish building the house. The morning was clear and bright, and Edgar and Ernest and I walked up to the homestead to see what could be done with the things. When we got to the creek, we found the crossing considerably damaged. It was a bridge that the settlers themselves had constructed, the bodies of two large trees laid across from bank to bank, and poles laid crosswise, with old hay and brush on top. The water had risen during the night, and had carried away considerable of this old stuff, and there was danger in crossing with a team.

As soon as we arrived at the scene of the previous day's disaster, we went right to work unpacking the boxes, etc. The sun shone out bright and warm, and we spread out the beds and bed-clothing on the ground. We had brought along a good many things from England, and amongst them some good clothes for each one. And it was the greatest wonder that everything was not totally ruined. But the things were so closely packed in the boxes that many of them were not in as bad condition as we expected they would be. As we worked our way towards the bottom, we found the things mixed up a good deal in mud. There were many little trinkets on which we had bestowed extra care, and amongst them a small eight-day timepiece; also a silver teapot.

During the morning my wife came up, bringing Leonard along; for the sun shone out so bright that the prairie was drying fast. Whilst she busied herself looking over the clothes and other things, which were scattered over several rods of prairie, the two boys and myself went on a tour down the ravine, hoping that we might discover some of the lost wreckage. Our first discovery was a letter written only a short time before by one of the heads of the firm in which I was employed in London. It was lodged in some brushwood, and covered with mud, the envelope being gone entirely. The letter was dated April 25, 1872. This was one of the things on which we had bestowed so much care, on account of the words it contained. Thus encouraged, we went on, and about fifty rods away another discovery was made. This time it was a very heavy, long, double-barreled shotgun. We at first took it to be a stick of wood standing up in the mud at the bottom of the ravine. Still more encouraged! So on we went again, and about

a quarter of a mile farther on we stumbled onto a two-gallon earthenware jug, nearly filled with molasses, buried in the mud. Luckily, the cork was in securely. Leaving this on top of the bank, we went on again till we came almost to the creek, when the fourth prize came in sight. This time it was a common water-pail perched on top of the bank. We went on down to where the ravine emptied into the creek, but, finding nothing more, we returned. Later in the day I got Hiram to come up with his team, and we loaded on the wagon such things as we could manage to get along without, and hauled them up to the house, or walls of the house, rather, and stowed them away in the largest room. We then loaded on the other things, and took them down and put them in the little room; and there we staid two or three weeks.

Several of the little trinkets that were in the boxes, and those in the cabin, were utterly ruined, and amongst them was the little timepiece. A silver teapot was also amongst these things, but that, of course, could be cleaned up again. It was not so much for their intrinsic value that we prized them so highly, but for what they represented to us. They reminded us of other days and scenes and associations, and were a presentation by a lodge of Odd Fellows for which I had been secretary for a number of years.

Having sustained such a severe setback, it seemed now a forlorn hope to get the house completed for quite a time yet; so we made up our minds to build up the walls and put a roof over the largest room, and leave the rest to be done at some future time. It took us several days to do this, for the progress was very slow. The walls at last being completed, we put on the ridge-pole and rafters, which were nothing but green cottonwood.

And now we needed brushwood; so we made several trips a mile and a half to the creek, and cut willows, and trailed them in bundles behind us. These we laid evenly over the rafters. Just here a difficulty arose; we had need of some hay to spread over the brush. The prairie had been swept clean by the fires running over it, but in the ravine the grass had grown to a considerable height, although as yet there was scarcely any on the level prairie. But we had no scythe, not even a sickle, to cut it with. So we took a couple of table-knives, and went to work with them, cutting a little handful at a time. The usual way, at that time, was to throw on loose dirt; but here again I tried a new plan, by first placing a layer of sod on the hay, and then about three inches of dirt, and then again another layer of sod. Having done this, we thought it best to have our things brought up and "move in" the next day, although we had no door on nor window in, nor anything whatever done to the interior.

As we walked home that night, we looked back occasionally, and felt a good deal relieved, having got so much done. But alas, how full of disappointment this world of ours is! That night a great storm came up, and the creek was swollen to the top of its banks, carrying away everything that went to make up the old bridge except the big, heavy stringers. As Edgar and I were tramping our way up the valley the next morning, it was with difficulty that we reached the house, for the valley was flooded. As we came in sight of the house, it seemed to present a strange appearance; and when we came up onto higher ground, it looked as though there was an open space between the two gable walls. And, sure enough, when we drew a little nearer, we saw that the roof, which had cost us so many days of hard toil,

had fallen in. When we approached the ruins, and looked in on the mass of dirt and mud—a good many tons of it—mixed up with the poles, brushwood, and hay, burying out of sight the things that we had piled up in one corner of the room, I must confess that I felt a little heartsick and inclined to be discouraged. But in a moment I said to myself: "What's the use? To give way to such feelings will not help matters a particle, but tend, rather, to make a bad matter still worse." After clearing away the débris, we found that the table was badly shattered, and also one of the chairs. What, with the rain and mud together, the feather-bed and other things seemed just about ruined. All this mass of stuff was so mixed up and packed together that it was with the greatest difficulty and hard work that it could be separated and cleared away. Do the most and the best that we could, everything seemed to work against us, and at this stage of the proceedings we hardly knew what would be the best course to pursue. I had promised to plant corn for Hi Rice and another man to help balance up accounts for what they had done for me.

Just at this time our friend Kingham came up from Columbus. The time had come when some improvements must be made on his claim. So we went right to work and built up the walls of a small sod house ten by twelve feet; and, leaving it in that condition, we both went to planting corn for the two men. Most of the breaking and other farmwork at that time was done with oxen. After getting through our work for these two men, Mr. Kingham returned to Columbus, and Edgar and I renewed the work on the little sod house, with the intention, when completed, of occupying it till we could finish our own house. We had now only the roof to put on and

door to hang. In place of a window, we nailed a piece of a gunny sack over the frame, and as the walls were not plastered nor any floor put down, it was not long before we had it ready to move into. It may easily be imagined that after putting in two large boxes, the stove, one of the bedsteads, chairs, and sundry other articles, there was not much space of the hundred and twenty square feet left for us to rove about on. The pork barrel we kept outside, on the shady side of the house, sinking it part way into the ground. But of the salt pork we ate but little, not being accustomed to it, as did many of the settlers; that is, when they could get it. So we were quite liberal, and now and then gave pieces to the neighbors, some of whom had recently come into the country. Amongst them were three families from Wisconsin, each having children. They settled on homesteads adjoining one another, about a mile and a half or so up the valley. For some time they all lived together in a tent on one of the claims.

As the spring advanced and the weather got warmer, it became evident that, to save the meat from spoiling, something must be done speedily; so Edgar and Ernest, whilst I was away at work one day, said to their mother: "Mother, we're going to build a smokehouse and smoke the meat; it will keep it from spoiling, and give it a better flavor." So they made a hole in the ground, and built up a few sods around it, and fixed it so that the meat could be hung on some sticks laid across the top. Not knowing anything about the proper kind of material or fuel used to create a smoke, they knew, however, that an abundance of that which they needed could be obtained by burning green shoestring, as it was called, a woody kind of bush that grew on the prairie. So with these

they smoked the meat. They gave it an extra dose, and, no doubt, thought they were doing an extra fine job; but they just about spoilt it at the same time, for it gave to it such a strong and disagreeable flavor that we could hardly bear the smell of it, much less eat it. Fortunately, however, there were others around who seemed to have no scruples about it, so that there was none of it actually wasted.

As soon as we had moved into the little house, by the order of a man named Loran Clark I went to work digging a large cellar on Mrs. Rice's claim—some time afterwards Mr. Clark and Mrs. Rice were married—my work being "turned in," as they called it, on that which Hiram had done for me by hauling our goods from Columbus.

This first summer I had five acres of breaking done by a man named Kilburn, and planted it to corn; but the grasshoppers destroyed it, as they also did that of others.

We had now entered into July, and, being the first Fourth of July that the new country had seen—practically, at least—why should we not celebrate the "glorious Fourth?" We held the celebration in Clark's Grove, down on the creek. Of course, there was only a mere handful of us, and no pretensions to having anything elaborate were indulged in. We had, however, I remember, the indispensable reading of the Declaration of Independence, wherein the couple of dozen of listeners were reminded, as they had been on all previous celebrations, of the ill-treatment of the Colonists by the British, away back in olden times. We were told that "the history of the present king of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpation, all having, in direct object, the establishment of an absolute tyranny over the States." And, to prove the assertion, then followed the enumera-

tion of a long list of complaints, things that the king had done, and others that he had refused to do, but all equally bad. And the matter was left right there, without further explanation, as it always is, to prejudice the minds of children and ignorant people against England and English people of the present day.

After the reading of the Declaration of Independence, Loran Clark sang "Marching Through Georgia," as we sat around under the trees. And that is about all there was of the celebration, except a kind of picnic dinner. When dinner-time came, each family, or person, dragged out a basket, or whatever it might be, from its hiding-place under the seat in the wagon, or from behind a clump of brush, and squatted on the grass to eat and enjoy whatever had been prepared.

Before leaving the grove, I heard some of the men talking about "going down to the Elkhorn to harvesting." They meant by that, that they were going somewhere in the neighborhood of what was then known as Bell Creek, Washington County. There seemed little here in the new country that any one could do unless he had a team and implements to work with; and many who had, felt the need of going away off where work could be had and money earned, so that they and their families might live. So I cast in my lot with the rest. I had never worked in the harvest-field, so that I was not altogether without misgivings lest, when put to the test, following after a reaper, I might fail to keep up my "station." But whatever I set my mind to, I always entered upon it with a determination either to "do, or die," as I have heard some say. That predominant, dogged, persistent will power over that of the physical was so strong that I would continue on until I might fall in my place, rather

than give up. It may be that this was unwise very often, and no doubt exists in my mind that it has cost me dearly many a time. But whether a fault or something else, it is a thing that I have never been able to rid myself of; bearing acute physical suffering rather than let it be seen that the task was master of me.

The men were going to start early the next morning; so we left the grove rather early, in order to make preparations for my leaving home. I had always paid close attention to home affairs; and I can not help thinking, seeing what drudgery many wives and little children are often wrongfully and unnecessarily subjected to, how easy it seemed for some men to go off and leave their families to shift for themselves the best way they could. So on that account it was no easy matter for me to go away and leave my wife and children alone. I knew, too, that the boys would have to carry all the water they used from Dresser's place, a mile and a half away; and also to gather up what few sticks of wood they might be able to find down in the ravine for fuel. But to live, we must have food to eat, and this thought prevailed over the other, and I went.

CHAPTER X

In the Harvest-field

AS THE men were thinking of starting early, I was up betimes, determined not to be left behind. I carried along a monster carpet-bag that we had brought from England, filled with a change of clothes. I got down town long before the rest were ready to start. The party consisted of seven altogether, and there were two teams. All the men except myself had a team of some kind, but some left theirs at home. It was quite late when we got started, and one of the horses becoming lame, we made rather slow progress.

Our point of destination was not a great way from Bell Creek—something over a hundred miles—which we made in three days and a half. When we arrived, we found that the grain would not be ready to cut for two or three days; but our board was provided all the same by those for whom we were going to work. Three of us went to work for our future neighbor, Mr. Francisco. He and another man, named Hamilton, one of our party, cut the grain in the old-fashioned way with cradles. The man who had come out from New York City and myself followed behind with rakes, raking it into bundles and binding it. As neither of us had had any experience in the harvest-field, and as we did our work well—so they said, at least—we felt somewhat encouraged. The grain in one field was cut in this way, but the rest was cut with what was called a “dropper.”

When we had finished work at this place, I went to work for another man, some distance away. Here they had a different kind of machine—a reaper, or what was sometimes called a “self-rake.” Five or six men usually were placed at equal distances round a field, which were called “stations,” following each other and binding the grain into bundles as it was swept from the platform by a revolving arm or rake. Here, too, I received a good deal of favorable comment, not alone for keeping up my station, but for taking all the grain into the bundles, leaving no scatterings; and also for binding the bundle so tightly and securely that there was no danger of its falling apart when handled—a fault of so much of the work that used to be done in the harvest-field.

The self-rake superseded the dropper. Then came the “harvester.” This was considered a great stride in the improved methods of cutting grain. With this machine the grain was carried up on canvas elevators and let fall onto a table; two men standing on a platform alternately took a quantity into their arms, placed it upon a side table and bound it, and then threw it off.

For some years past the “self-binder” has gone away ahead of all other harvesting machinery—that is, for cutting the grain—and it would seem to be all that could be desired, simply needing a team to draw the machine, and a man to drive and see that everything is running all right. But such strange things are coming to pass every day, it may yet be that both the man and the team will find their services are not needed; but the machine simply placed in the field will be told to go ahead and do its own work.

I had been at work at this place only two or three days when a letter came, saying, “Come home at once;

Edgar has met with an accident." At the same time, my wife's foot, which before I left home had shown signs of something being the matter, had become much worse. It proved to be erysipelas. So I obtained a little money from the man for whom I was working—just enough to get through with—and hurried off afoot. I walked into Bell Creek, and from there I traveled on the railroad track as far as Fremont, which at that time consisted of only a few small buildings. Here I took the train to Columbus, and from there—a distance of fifty miles—I again traveled on "shank's horses."

Although Edgar's hand was severely burned, it was not so bad as I expected it might be; for I didn't know till I reached home the exact nature of the accident. But, as it proved, it was not more serious than a severe burn, though painful enough.

The two boys, Edgar and Ernest, had come across some gunpowder in a tin can, that, like many other things, had had a thorough soaking in the washout two months before. It had dried and hardened into a solid, and its vitality, as an explosive at least, had been nearly destroyed. Edgar was holding a lump of this powder in his hand, "trying an experiment," as they called it. He was picking off small pieces and letting them fall on the hot stove, experiencing great delight in seeing them sparkle. But when a spark came in contact with that held in his hand, it may easily be imagined that the fun ended right there. His hand was very painful, and he carried it in a sling for some days.

My wife's foot also had become much worse since I went away. After rendering them all the assistance I could, we consulted together, and after two days at home, I started back again. I hardly liked to leave

them, however, especially considering the condition they were in. But imperative needs had the greater weight, and I hoped to get back in time to put in a few days before the cutting was all done.

With a good-bye salutation, as cheery as I might be able to make appear, I started out again over the same route traveled three or four days before. To my disappointment, when I got back, I found that the grain was just about all cut. The man for whom I had been working when called home wished me to stay and help him stack his grain. But considering the wages they were paying, added to the serious condition of things at home, it seemed best not to remain.

So gathering up my things into my monster carpet-bag, and receiving the few dollars that was due me, I again turned my face homeward. I traveled the old route, which by this time had become quite familiar. Arriving at Columbus about four o'clock in the afternoon, I staid here only long enough to purchase a rope, and a little tea to take home to my wife. Being inch rope, and sixty feet of it, what with that and the carpet-bag of colossal dimensions filled with clothes, I was pretty well loaded down. It was drawing toward evening when I threw the rope in a coil over my head, and, carrying it on my neck, started out. I had traveled only a few miles when darkness overtook me. I hardly fancied spending the night on the open prairie, for my deadly enemies the mosquitoes, swarmed my pathway. So coming up to a house close by the road nine or ten miles out, where lived a gentleman named Wright, a Baptist minister, I turned in. Going up to the house, I inquired if shelter for the night could be given me. And the minister himself, who answered my knock on the door,

replied, "I'm sorry we are not able to offer you better accommodations; but if you can put up with the cot, you will be most welcome." I thanked the gentleman for his kindly offer, and told him that, being anxious to reach home the next night, it would best suit me to steal away at the first glimmer of dawn. To which he replied, "That's all right." So the next morning, before the first streaks of gray had made their appearance in the eastern horizon, found me trudging along on the road with my load through the "prairie-dog town" spoken of before. Anxious to save myself any unnecessary steps, I attempted to make a short cut across the prairie, but soon found myself entangled in a perfect maze. I had wandered off into a jungle of tall grass and weeds and a kind of rush, and lost sight of the point for which I was aiming. There being a very heavy dew that morning, it was not long before I was as wet through as though I had been wading a river. After I had managed to extricate myself, and get onto the road and into the full glare of the sun, my feet became so sore that, later in the day, walking became a painful process. As I neared home toward sundown, the old trouble in my knee came back to me again, and it was with a good deal of difficulty and pain that the last four or five miles were made. On my arrival home, I found that Edgar's hand was making favorable progress; but his mother's foot had not improved any.

However much inclined I may have been to take a day's rest, there seemed too much that needed to be done to give thought to that. Carrying water in small quantities a mile and a half was a laborious task, and consumed a good deal of time. So now having a rope, I set about digging a well. Having had no experience,

and aiming to make room for a large body of water, I unwisely made the well about four feet across. I dug down till I could no longer throw out the dirt, and then attached a cord to a common water-pail, and Edgar and Ernest together drew it up, hand over hand. But as I dug deeper, it soon became too much for them; so I then made a windlass. I used to go down in the morning, and remain all day. For I didn't care to risk myself dangling on the end of a rope more than I was compelled to, though I helped myself all I could by pulling, or holding on to, a cord that hung down the side of the well. I can imagine I see myself now, resting on the spade as it stood against the wall, and munching a dry soda biscuit that had been let down to me; and that was my dinner.

My wife being always in great fear when we were engaged in work that she thought was the least dangerous, her foot being so bad that she could not bear putting it to the ground, would lie on the bed in the little sod house, about four hundred yards away, looking out from the door, watching the boys intently and with extreme anxiety lest some accident might happen. Before the completion of the well, her foot began to amend, and she could bear it no longer to remain so far away from the scene of danger, and would hobble across the five acres of breaking the best way she could. There she would sit by the well nearly the whole day long, and keep a strict vigil over every movement the boys made. When about fifty feet down we struck water; but we continued on till we had reached a depth of fifty-two feet; and in two or three days the water had risen to over three feet. This was ample supply for all purposes, for we had no stock of any kind to care for.

Quite late in the season, I had another five acres of breaking done by a young man named Curry. He and his mother had claims adjoining one another in Beaver Valley. Some time later, Mrs. Curry died, and was buried on the claim. Funeral services were held in the sod house, and were conducted by old Mr. Bollman—"Elder Bollman," as he was familiarly called. This was the first funeral, I believe, that had taken place in the neighborhood, if not the county; and nearly all the settlers in the vicinity were present. This breaking I paid for in various ways, helping Mr. Curry build a sod house some time later.

Toward the end of August, I thought we had better be doing something towards the completion of the house. One of the walls had settled out of perpendicular, so that it was necessary to tear down the greater portion of it and rebuild it.

Having served a term in the school of experience, we were ready to admit the truthfulness of the old adage, "Experience is the best teacher;" so instead of a six or seven inch pole, which resulted in a fallen roof and other damage, this time we went down to the cañon and chopped down quite a large cottonwood, and several of the neighbors came and helped us raise it in position. Although quite a long and heavy job for Edgar and myself alone, we at last managed to finish the house without any further mishap.

It was now drawing near to October. But just a little while before, however, we bought a cow; or, I might say, rather, our neighbor, Kingham, became responsible for the payment, and we repaid him in labor. Being a single man, he was away a good deal working at his trade, and we later on, having the care and use

of his yoke of oxen, made the necessary improvements on his claim.

We found it hard to provide a substitute for wheaten bread. Necessity compelled us to practice economy of the strictest; and being told that bread could be made from "shorts," we tried the experiment, but failed to produce anything that was really fit to eat. We then made mush of it; but as yet we had no milk, so we tried to eat it with a common kind of very black-looking molasses. Then we tried cornmeal, and ate that in the same way. Then again, we would try our hand at making "johnny-cake," as the folks called it. But somehow we didn't get hold of the right knack of mixing. When taken out of the oven it would be either close and heavy—more like a baked pudding—or else be all dry and crumbling, and would n't hang together. That was long before we heard of any such thing as bolted meal. We had never heard of these preparations as articles of food before coming to this country, and the stomach almost revolted at the sight of them; as in the case of the white beans and some other things whilst in St. Louis. And yet it seemed absolutely necessary that this feeling of nausea which they produced in some way be subdued; for the prospects for some time to come indicated that we must accustom ourselves to their use. There appeared no reasonable expectation that we would be able to make bread from wheat of our own raising for a couple of years, at least. So however repulsive they might be, we had to yield; for there were long periods when little else than cornmeal, prepared in one way or another, could be hoped for. For quite a long time it was hard to dispel the idea that this cornmeal mush—or corn in whatever way prepared—was little other than pig's food.

"For in England they feed the pigs with better food than that," we used to say. But it being altogether new to us, and being ignorant of the methods of preparing it, I think we were not altogether to blame; especially as we were not given to complaining at trifles, but always tried to make the best of everything.

One day a little incident occurred that tickled our fancy, and, though trivial as it may seem, has never been forgotten. The woman of one of the families living up the valley, with her three little children, being at our house, took dinner with us. We had, I remember, some of that pork which the boys had given such a terrible smoking, and some johnny-cake. What seemed so strange and funny to us was to hear the children ask for more dripping, or gravy, as we called it. They would say: "Ma, ma! I want some grease! Give me some grease, ma!" We had not heard before of the dinner-table being furnished with "grease" as one of the dishes, and we were a good deal amused.

CHAPTER XI

Fight for the County-Seat

EDGAR having been invited to spend a few days at Columbus with some of his old schoolmates, he went down and staid a week. And when ready to return home, the two Coolidge boys, with whom he had been staying, gave him a little mite of a pig. Another boy—Thompson Elliott, the minister's son—also gave him a white hen. One of the settlers from our neighborhood happened to be at Columbus at the time, and Edgar took the opportunity to get a ride home, bringing his live stock along with him. And here was the foundation on which our future pig and poultry raising was built. The pig proved to be of an excellent kind, and in time gave us a dozen or more little ones—all pure white, like herself; it was almost a curiosity to see other than white pigs at that time. After keeping her about three years, we killed her, and she weighed over four hundred pounds. But coming from England, and being used to having fresh meat, we could eat but little salt pork, and longed for beef and mutton. But beef was always a long distance out of sight, and the word "mutton" seemed almost forgotten.

Having finished the house, we moved in about the beginning of October. The walls were rough, just as they had been built, and there was no floor, of course. In the case of a dugout, where the hard soil (or a kind

of clay) is reached, a pretty fair floor may be made. But in the case of a house built on top of the ground it is different. The sod simply being taken off, the top soil is loose and dry, and needs very often a good sprinkling of water to keep down the dust. But the constant moving about makes it impossible to keep it firm, unless quite a good deal of water is used. This makes the floor muddy and sticky, and extremely disagreeable. But O the dust! what a preserve for fleas! To do them proper credit, chapter after chapter might be written. Fleas, fleas, fleas! and not alone in the houses, but out-of-doors also; on the prairie and everywhere. There was no place where you could hide away from them. They made a great part of life miserable, especially when in bed—no real rest from good, sound sleep could be had. During the summer and other warm periods the men folk wore what they called overalls, made of thin material and hanging quite loosely. Many times during the day some unseen force would constrain us to turn up the legs of our pants and let go free these pesky little creatures. They could be seen by the dozen, like grasshoppers, springing in every direction from under the seams as they were pulled apart. To be dextrous enough to catch one of these little imps, and wreak vengeance on him as a warning to others of his kind, seemed almost an idle fancy. There was always a feeling of delight and satisfaction, and the exclamation, "I've got you this time! have n't I?" on hearing his bones crack, if one did happen to get caught. Many and many a time I have seen the women take up their skirts in both hands and give them a good shaking, hoping to unload and rid themselves of at least a portion of their heavy burden—heavy, not from bulk or

avoirdupois, but heavy indeed on account of the torture they inflicted. I have known my wife many times almost prostrated by thus being deprived of proper and needful rest.

I remember one summer especially; it was the first year that our neighbor, Cummings, and the Willot brothers ran a "header," and I helped do the stacking. At night we staid wherever we happened to be, unless we were quite near home. We usually lay on the floor, with simply a blanket or two, or buffalo robe, under us. Having no covering over us, we would lie with our pants on, and the fleas would be so tormenting that it seemed I never got any sleep all the time I was away from home. And the worse night, I think, that I ever experienced with fleas was when we staid at old Mr. Willot's place. That time I lay on a buffalo-robe, and did n't sleep a wink the whole night long, but kept wriggling and twisting all the time. Instead of being rested and strengthened for the labors of the coming day, I felt more tired when I arose in the morning than I did on lying down at night.

Some would pour boiling water over the floor, hoping to kill them off by scalding, but it seemed a waste of time; for if any lost their lives by that process we never discovered the difference. It was not alone in sod houses that they created a riot and made such terrible havoc, but they were everywhere alike. And later on, when a little frame shanty or schoolhouse dotted the prairie here and there, they made equally bold to enter them. And despite scalding the floor, as some did three or four times a week, it was a home seemingly good enough for them, and they were unwilling to be driven out.

Having now a cow, we of course must make provision for her for the winter. So I hired a man, "Dutch" John Martin, as he was called, to come with his machine—the only thing of that kind anywhere about—and cut some grass. When sufficiently dry, we raked it into heaps with a couple of rakes that I had made for the purpose—I usually made a good many things of similar kind for my own use. Through the man's carelessness, I came very close to a serious accident. The man had struck the machine in gear, and was ready to start up, when I was standing near by, but quite clear of the machine, pointing out where I wanted him to cut. All of a sudden, and without the least warning, he wheeled the horses round, and started the machine. Before I could make a move to get out of the way—my back being towards the machine—the end finger-guard, as it was called, struck my heel, and tore a hole through my boot. As soon as he saw what had happened, he, of course, stopped the horses as quickly as possible. Only about two inches more, and my heel must have been caught between the guards, and nothing could have prevented it from being cut clear off, or cut square into from behind. Even as it was, it seemed almost a miracle that I received no more injury than a slight scratch; for the guards themselves were sharp-pointed. The man was a German, and I could hardly understand his attempted English. He seemed to realize something of the seriousness of the situation, however; and from appearances was not altogether scare-proof.

I remember when I was a boy, on receiving a fright in some way, we used to say, "I don't know how I look, but I feel pretty white." Of course, I had no mirror handy in which to look to find out how I appeared about

that time; but when I realized the narrow escape I had had, I did at least feel a little pale, if not white.

Having no means of getting in the hay, I engaged the men who lived together in the little settlement up the valley to help me, as two of the men had each a team of his own; and in return for this, I agreed to go down their well and dig it deeper. So after stacking the hay, which took only a little while, I went the next day to work on the well. The well was nearly sixty feet deep, and quite small—so small that I could not stoop low enough without striking my head against the wall. Having drawn out all the water we possibly could, I continued to dig till, in stooping, my face touched the water, and I thought it then about time to stop. The men pulled me up, and I hastened into the tent (they were all still living in a tent). Hunting up some old clothes, I quickly made a change; for the weather was quite cool at this time. They then made up a roaring fire, so that I might not take cold, and the women at once set about preparing an early supper of stewed chicken—that part of it I remember very well, for it tasted so good to me. Where and how they obtained the chicken, I could n't even guess. By this I don't mean to insinuate that they had been visiting somebody's hen-roost away off in some of the older settlements where they had had a little time to devote to chicken-raising.

These were all new experiences for me; but many times afterwards they complimented me on the "excellent job" I did on the well; for, ever after that, they had an abundance of pure water.

About this time there was considerable agitation and excitement going the rounds with regard to the location

of the county-seat. There were two places named as competitors. One was on Loran Clark's place—which we had been calling Hammond—on the corner of which claim stood the little frame building mentioned several times before. To this place had been given the name of Albion. The other was at a point in Beaver Valley, about six miles below, on Harvey Maricle's claim, and called Boone. I remember an informal meeting being held in Mr. Maricle's house—a frame building, and one of the first of that kind in the county. Little speeches were made, and some rather warm discussion all around as to the advantages and disadvantages of the two places. So, finally, to ascertain the sentiment of the little gathering, the question was put to a vote. Of course, as might be expected, we from our point had rallied all our forces, and had gone down there a dozen strong. So when the vote was taken, it was shown that we were the stronger party of the two; and we came home that night in high glee.

On the first Tuesday of the previous January, a special election had been held, at which several county officers were elected. Elias Attwood, Edward Dwyer ("Ed," as he was always called), an Irishman, and M. E. Stevens were judges; A. W. Dyer and Sylvester Kinney were clerks of election. S. P. Bollman was elected probate judge; S. Kinney, county clerk; and T. H. Bowman, treasurer. "Need" Myers was elected sheriff, and William Evans, coroner. S. P. Bollman was also elected superintendent of public instruction. A. Crites, "Ed" Dwyer, and "Tom" Wilkinson were elected county commissioners. "Tom" was an Englishman, and crammed just as full as he could be with English history—and especially ancient history. And it was amusing, when

the men would be gathered at the polling-place at election time, and at other political gatherings, to hear his fluent tongue, with his strong Yorkshire brogue, as he would run off a long string of ancient history such as the listeners had never heard before. If it was not genuine Yorkshire, it was something so close to it that I couldn't detect the difference. The remark would often be heard, "Tom's a long-headed fellow, is n't he?"

The next election took place on the 8th day of October, when the county-seat came up for settlement. I was on the Election Board as one of the clerks, having for my colleague, William Weitzel. We were then in what was called Oakland Precinct, which was afterwards divided several times, as more settlers came in. At different times the precinct was so divided and changed that I was next in Ashland, then in Shell Creek, and, last of all, in Midland.

The polling-place in our precinct at this election was in a sod house five or six miles up Beaver Valley, on the claim of a young man named Loomis. He and another young man named Wanzer were staying in the house together, and "batching it." We had but little to occupy our time; that is, with regard to recording votes. For although the precinct was so large, embracing the greater portion of the northern half of the county, there were but few voters; and some who lived a long distance off failed to make their appearance. Mr. Clark being specially interested in the county-seat, though not a resident of our precinct, was there all day watching the proceedings. We had no regular printed form or poll-books on which to make our returns, but simply some scraps of plain paper, about eight inches square, that we luckily found about the place. I did, however,

as was my custom on all similar occasions, carry along my own pen, having been elected and serving as clerk of election year after year for about twelve years. One thing, at least, the voters seemed to recognize and appreciate, that if elected to office they would be sure to find me in my place, and at the appointed time, no matter what the difficulties might be in getting there. Many a time I have set out early in the morning, and tramped across the prairie, through the tall grass and weeds, heavily laden with dew or frost, up over hill and down through deep gulch, to Shell Creek, five or six or more miles away, and would often get myself as wet through as a drowned rat. For in the earlier times special elections were often held, for voting on bridge bonds, court-house bonds, etc., which would occur at any time. My near neighbor, who had a horse team, would sometimes say to me: "Why don't you wait, and ride over with me; I will be going over in a couple of hours. There will be nobody else there, and you can't do anything." And just there is where so many of us are at fault. We are so easily inclined to do as others do; and too often try to make ourselves think that because others are slack in performing their duty, simply on that account we, too, have a good reason for being the same.

As I have stated, we were not rushed in our business, one or two strolling in along through the day and handing in their ballots to one of the judges, who pressed them through the little slit cut in the lid of an empty cigar-box—for we were in no sense aristocratic about such things in those days. The voter having passed in his ballot, would usually sit and lounge around the rest of the day. It was a time, too, when we discovered what dashing and heroic exploits some of our quiet and

innocent neighbors had performed in some other period of their lives, a good way back. The big stories of the still greater deeds in which they had been chief actors, somewhere, at some time, had a tendency to make them out to be pretty old men. But the antiquated story and the middle-aged man did not always fit very neatly. The big, broad smiles as they would flit from one to another as they sat, one on the wood-box, one on the stove, another on a backless chair,—quite a luxury,—and still another up in the corner, sprawling on the dirt floor, in a free-and-easy kind of fashion, one would think would be enough for these heroes of other days to take a hint from, and have their “pieces” a little better prepared the next time.

When it came time for dinner, although perhaps not in accordance with the laws governing elections, we thought it would be no serious violation—out here on the wild Western prairie, at any rate—to call an adjournment for dinner. So the fellow who sprawled on the floor in the corner, without discussion or remarks, thinking it to be parliamentary and the proper way, sings out—at the same time making a dash for the stove, for the boys had a real stove in the house—“I move you, Mr. Election Board, that *we all*”—with a good deal of emphasis on the words “*we all*”—“adjourn for dinner!” And that was all there was to it. The man, I presume, had not much of an idea that he was not a member of that august body; but he was a voter, and wanted his dinner as well as anybody else, and that was enough for him. And so, there being not the least objection to his motion, it was taken for granted that it was carried unanimously, and the recess was had.

For a little while there was a good deal of bustling

and scuffling about and getting in one another's way, and raising considerable dust; for almost every one had a hand in preparing the meal. The fellow who came out from the corner, however, took the lead, and had a fire going in a jiffy, whilst another was mixing a paste of cornmeal for making flapjacks. Another was cutting up slices of bacon to be fried; another grinding coffee, and so on. So with all this, with molasses to eat with the pancakes, we had quite a variety. Considering my almost utter failure heretofore in trying to become an expert in the cornmeal department, I could hardly expect to be allowed to have a hand in the flapjack business. But I could beat all the rest in almost any other kind of culinary work; so I was not at loss for a job.

We could not all sit at the table—a drygoods box—at one time; neither was there tinware enough to go round. The fellow out from the corner, however, took particular care to find himself at the "first table," as he called it.

After finishing our dinner, we again placed our papers on the table, so as to be ready for any callers who might happen to drop in. But we found little to give us practice in the art of penmanship; and the time might have proved a little irksome had it not been that our entertainers of the morning had yet a supply of their innocent stories to recite, and so came to our relief, and none went to sleep. But there was little danger of that happening, for the fleas were on duty in full force, and having fine sport in the two inches of loose, dry dirt which we called the floor.

In making up the returns, it was found that our precinct had voted solidly for Albion for the county-seat. And when the returns came in from all the precincts

it was shown that Albion had received sixty-seven votes, and Boone twenty-one. So Albion was declared to be the county-seat of Boone County. But here a difficulty arose. The Boone folks feeling a little sore, as we say, over their defeat, resorted to subterfuge. They said, "There is no Albion in the county; and one place may just as well be called Albion as another; so we will call our place Albion." The plat of the town had not been recorded, I presume, or something of that kind; but I do not remember now exactly how it was. But a scheme was started to forestall Albion and steal away her prize. Mr. Clark, however, discovered the plot, and the Legislature being in session, he made post-haste to Lincoln, and the matter was settled for Clark's Albion as the county-seat.

In preparing the ballots and poll-books—or sheets, rather—to send in to the county clerk, my colleague and the rest of the board insisted on sending in the one that I had made, and that his be retained in the precinct, as was the custom, till the next election. "For," said he, "the handwriting is so fine, and so neat and clean; not a speck or blot about it." A young man named Langtree, and Loran Clark, during the day had been examining and admiring my work, and almost covering me up, as it were, with commendations. And it was the same in all subsequent elections; so much so indeed that I often felt, if not just like an ostrich—burying his head in the sand when in danger—at least like hiding myself away in some corner. They might say what best pleased them behind my back, where I could not hear it; but I have always been averse to having praise heaped upon me right before my face. But it was the same in many other things, even when only a boy. It is a delicate

matter to speak of one's self in this way; but many times my face has flushed crimson on account, as I have always felt, of this unmerited praise. Although appreciating in a high degree any special ability in others, I do not realize anything extraordinary in my own ability along different lines. But this perhaps may be on account of never having felt the necessity of bestowing very great or extra labor in acquiring that ability, if so people will insist on calling it. That does not mean that I have not been diligent. Certainly, however, it has not come through the instruction received in the commonest of common schools, especially at the time when I received it; and going out to work when only ten years of age, the instruction amounted to almost nothing.

As I sat there in Mr. Becker's store one day, working away on the books, I remember the principal of the town schools stood leaning against the desk, and, I suppose, looking me over, for it was the first time he had seen me; and he said, "You can drive a quill pretty good, can't you?" My back was towards him, however, and I made no reply, seeming not to notice him.

As the years went past, and the country became more thickly settled, the voters would usually stand around the polling-place all day, filling the room. And, if the weather was mild and pleasant, some would be outside. I could not help being amused sometimes to hear the remarks that were made as some stretched their neck and peered over the shoulders of others. One would say, "You bet your life, you would n't catch me out here on this darn prairie, if I could use a pen like you can!" "No, nor me, either," rejoined another; "in less than twenty-four hours you 'd find me back there in one o' them big cities!" And so they would talk. But, of

course, I never appeared to notice them; for, I presume, they hardly realized how they were talking.

I have in my possession something in the way of a relic—a memento of this identical election of which I have been speaking. It is in the form of an election certificate, and written with pen and ink on a sheet of plain foolscap paper. We had no printed form of certificate, the same as we had in later years. A young man named Sylvester Kinney was county clerk at the time, the first the county had, the certificate being made out by W. J. Nelson, who was deputy clerk. The paper bears the impress or seal of the commissioners' court of Boone County, and reads thus:

“CERTIFICATE OF ELECTION.

STATE OF NEBRASKA, } ss.
BOONE COUNTY,

I, Sylvester Kinney, County Clerk of Boone County, State of Nebraska, do hereby certify, that at a regular election held within and for the said county on the 8th day of October, A. D. 1872, John Turner was duly elected to the office of Clerk of Election for Oakland Precinct, Boone County, for the term of one year, and until his successor is duly elected and qualified.

Witness my hand and the seal of said County this 18th day of October,
A. D. 1872.

S. KINNEY, *County Clerk.*
W. J. NELSON, *Deputy.*”

CHAPTER XII

Experience with "Old Mike," the Mailcarrier

THE cold and stormy weather of winter was now fast approaching, and having no place of shelter for the cow, we thought it unsafe any longer to put off making some kind of provision. So we went down into the "big" ravine and dug a hole in the bank large enough for two cows. We then put on a roof the same as for a sod house. Setting up one of the doors which we intended to use for the house against the entrance, it was ready for use. It took us altogether about a week to complete the job.

There being no prospect of having anything to put into it this year, but hoping that such a thing would be needed next year, we now set to work making quite a large excavation for a cellar, or cave, as it was sometimes called. Here was a big job on our hands, and a large amount of solid, hard work. We did not expect to be able to complete it, but were anxious to make all the headway possible with any improvement that would be needed in the near future. We had strong belief in that old proverb which says something about "making hay while the sun shines." So day after day we worked and dug.

One day whilst we were busy digging away, two of the neighboring settlers walking past, turned in to see what we were doing. These same men a little time

before had stopped on their way "to town." The wind had scattered the hay about over the yard, and I was cleaning it up with a rake. I always liked to have things neat and clean, even a farmyard. After watching me a few moments, one of them said, "What's the use your doing that; it'll be just as bad again in a day or two." I thought differently, however, and made no reply, but kept right on with my work. On the present occasion they stood for a few minutes looking, and seemed a little surprised to see the big hole we were making. Presently one of them said, in a kind of sarcastic way, "What are you making that for?" I replied that I was trying to make a cellar. He then said: "You had better wait and see if you have anything to put into it first." I told him that I lived in hopes of having something some day, and preferred rather to have a place prepared than to have the stuff and no place to put it.

Here was the difference; these men were going downtown to "kill time," as I have heard them say many a time. As for myself, I have never been driven to the necessity of "killing time." The difficulty with me has always been that time has flown much too rapidly without any destructive effort on my part. Doubtless, farmers as a rule are an industrious and thrifty class of people; but for all that, in many cases at least, there used to be considerable "killing time" going on.

The nights were now getting cold, and the days were not altogether pleasant, either, indicating that weather of almost any kind ought not to be a surprise. Anxious to provide warmer quarters for the pig, "Bessy," and also for the chickens—for the white "Biddy" had raised a brood of little ones, and, of course, they too must have a warmer house for winter—we stopped working on the

cellar, and went to building a sod house for the pig, and also one to be used for a chicken-roost.

By the time we had completed these jobs the weather was cold and stormy, and it seemed that winter was now fairly upon us, and from this on it was about all that we could do to provide ourselves with fuel. We used to go down in the ravine and pick up all the old dead stuff that we could find, and cutting out the little brushwood that had been killed by prairie fires. There were six or seven large elms on the claim, but I could hardly bear the thought of cutting down these and burning them if there was any possible way to get along without; for it was these trees that had played such an important part in inducing me to settle on the land. There happened to be, however, a couple of elms that had been blown down. They were full of knots, and very hard to do anything with; but we chopped and hacked at these, carrying home the proceeds of our labor in sacks. Having no team that we could haul it with, or to go away off to get wood, I was a little reluctant to let any of it go; but I did in one instance let a neighbor, at a stormy time, have quite "a little jag," as he called it, and for this he hauled a little to the house for me.

That was the way with some. When the weather was so that they might and ought to have been laying in a supply against a "rainy day," they would be downtown "killing time." And this was one of the men who only a little time before, and rather sneeringly, it appeared to me, suggested that I had better wait and see if I would have anything to put into it before making a cellar; but, as I have said before, I always preferred to "make hay in fair weather."

I will not weary the reader with the many incidents

that contributed to make up this first hard winter on the wild, open prairie. As I have said, when the weather was so that we could be out, the time was principally taken up in carrying up wood and preparing it for fuel. Some of the few little bits of cornstalks that the grasshoppers had left, and stalks of the sunflower, we chopped up and stowed away in one of the small rooms in the house. We tried almost everything that would suggest itself as fuel. Hearing of some burning the dry, hard droppings of the cattle picked up on the prairie, "Buffalo chips," as they were called, we thought that we would give them a trial; but a very small dose of that kind was all that was needed to cure us of that longing. We could get no flame from them, but they simply smoldered away; and, worse than all, they filled the house with an odor almost unbearable.

Although the country was so new, we were not altogether deprived of religious privileges on the Sabbath. The first summer we had services of some kind almost every Sunday afternoon. An old gentleman, Rev. S. P. Bollman, a Methodist minister having no charge, preached sometimes in the "hotel," and in different houses and shanties close around.

When we left St. Louis and came to Columbus, a young man named Marshall Smith arrived there about the same time, and started a little bakery, and shortly after added a line of groceries. The building in which he was conducting business was quite small, but trade increased rapidly, and he appeared to be prospering, and doubtless he was. He may have been gathering in the fruits of an honest, fair and square dealing in his business, for he was a good Christian young man. He soon found it necessary to move into more commodious quar-

ters. Seeing me in Mr. Becker's store a few times, we became a little acquainted; so along about this time, February, he wrote, asking if I would go down and assist him in moving his goods into a larger building. I felt somewhat perplexed to know what to do about going—to leave my wife and children in this, often the most severe month of winter, with so little, if any, of the commonest comforts. These thoughts caused me to hesitate. Then again, I said to myself, "How much we are in need, and what a help the few dollars that I might earn would be to us!" So we talked the matter over pretty thoroughly together. No matter how dreary the outlook, and though frail in health, my wife was always willing to assent to any project, if she thought it would "be for the best," as she would often say. The all-important question with her was, "Is it right?" Being satisfied on that point, and leaving entirely out of thought what it might entail by way of discomfort, hardship, or even privation, she thought that if it is right, it must ultimately and surely be for the best.

I made what preparations I was able in order that things might go as easy with them as possible during my absence. I took along my "second best" clothes—a term used in England; for, as I have stated, we brought along a fair supply when we came to this country. Our present needs lay more in the way of clothes for every-day use; so, if we should take and use up our best, the prospects for replacing them were clear beyond our vision.

The mail service had been extended and a post-office established, and Mr. Dresser was appointed postmaster, and, of course, had his office—we will call it that—in the little dugout in which he lived. An empty cracker-box, divided into small spaces and fastened with wooden pegs

against the dirt wall, served for mail-boxes. The man who drove the mail-wagon lived at Columbus, the same "Old Mike Walsh" spoken of in a previous chapter. My purpose was to ride to Columbus with Mike, so I went down on the morning he would leave. When I got down to Mr. Dresser's, Mike was just getting out his team making ready to start. I asked him what his charge would be to carry me to Columbus, and he said that he would let me ride for a dollar. So I said to him: "I have n't any money now, but will be able to pay you pretty soon, for I'm going down to do a little work for Marshall Smith." He hemmed and hawed a good deal, and finally said, in a gruff and surly tone, "I can't afford to haul folks for nothin'." And the more I pleaded with him the more obstinate he seemed to get, and started off without me.

Mike had always appeared to me to be made up of a great bundle of eccentricity, so I was not so greatly surprised as I would have been had it been some other person. As he started up his horses, I took hold of the hind end of the wagon—a small spring wagon—and, resting my satchel in the wagon as I held it with my other hand, I trotted along behind, determined not to be outdone, knowing well my powers of endurance. It may be, though, that I might not have undertaken to perform the task just in that way, only that I might show to old Mike what an independent spirit, combined with a determined will, could accomplish, in spite of all his meanness. The road happened to be in good condition for traveling. His first halting-place was at a post-office called Boone, about six miles down the valley. After exchanging the mail, he mounted his seat, and drove off again without uttering a word to me, or I to him. However, the few

minutes delay had afforded me time to replenish my breathing apparatus with a fresh supply of oxygen. The atmosphere was not so very cold, but a strong wind came up, and later in the day it blew a perfect gale. As I was traveling a good deal in line with the wind, I did not feel its effects. In fact, I was all wet with sweat, having on two coats. Now and again old Mike would cast a sly glance over his shoulder at me, and seemed to experience a delight, but said nothing. This continued till we reached the Indian Agency, a distance of about twenty-five miles from my home. Here Mike unhitched his team and put them in the barn, whilst eating his dinner in the house. During the time we were here I stood outside and took a little lunch which I had brought along in my satchel.

After dinner, when he had got his team all ready, he climbed into his seat and was about to start, when I made straightway for my old position behind the wagon, with as strong determination as ever to be a "hanger on," if nothing more. I thought maybe he might yet relent, and show a little compassion, but I said nothing; for when I had made up my mind on doing a thing like that, it took more than a twenty-five mile trot to turn me from my purpose.

What had taken possession of Mike I do n't know. It may have been something in the dinner that he ate that had affected him. However, as soon as he was comfortably seated, he picked up the lines, and then all of a sudden turned himself, and, looking out from under the broad brim of his very much of a slouch hat, in a low and sullen tone said to me, and for the first time he had spoken since we started, "I guess you had better get up into the seat." By this time there was a pretty strong

feeling of American independence, with a little of the English still left, working its way into my bones; but it was hardly strong enough to drive me into a mood of sulkiness, and refuse the invitation. As a kind of offset to his own peculiar behavior, I politely thanked him for his very kind offer, saying that I thought the idea rather a pleasant one, and quietly took my seat by his side. The little experience, however, it might be for me—for most assuredly there remained some little of stiffness and soreness for some days to come—may, after all, have had a tendency to soften a little, if not very much, that stony heart inside of old Mike. Our conversation was of few words, and they quite a long way apart. If we had felt like talking politics even, for a change, the wind blew too hard for that, and it would have been like much other of its kind, so mixed up with the "gushing wind" that it would have been difficult to distinguish which was the one and which was the other.

I have been on the road many times in much more freezing weather, yet was never more thoroughly chilled through my whole system than on this occasion. When we arrived at the next post-office—Monroe, it was called—I went into the house with Mike whilst the mail was being changed, to get a warming by the stove. As I turned the corner of the house, the wind struck me with such force that it took me clean off my feet, and laid me sprawling as flat as a flounder on the hard ground. The mail-bag being ready, on we went again, not stopping any more till we reached Columbus, about five o'clock in the evening. Just the way I settled with Mike I do not remember; I rather think, though, that he did not charge me anything. He may have thought, though, hard-hearted as he was, that I had paid dearly enough for the

little ride already. Poor "old Mike!" he has been gone from this country these many years, to somewhere, who knows? I wonder if ever I shall meet him again!

I shall never forget the condition I was in; every part of my whole frame was so intensely chilled and paralyzed that it affected my speech. And when I entered the store and attempted to talk with Mr. Smith, my teeth chattered so that it was not until I had thawed myself out by the stove that I could speak plainly. Seeing the condition I was in, he said to me: "Well, you go to the stove and get well warmed through, and we'll then go to the house and get supper." It took a good hour's roasting to bring me back to a normal condition.

After supper we returned to the store, and, with a wheelbarrow, went right to work. The larger part of the stock had already been removed from the old place, but there was scarcely anything put in proper order.

When Sunday came, I sought out the old church once more, and heard Mr. Elliott preach.

At the end of four weeks, our neighbor, Mr. Kingham, met me there, and we went down across the Platte River to look at a yoke of oxen with a view to buying them; and, the bargain being made, we drove them into Columbus the next day. Here we found some old, discarded threshing-machine trucks, and these he bought also. We then procured some boards, and made a kind of box, and nailed it onto the trucks. Having already purchased a few little articles of groceries, we loaded up the temporary wagon with corn to feed the oxen. The arrangement we made was this: That I was to have the care of the oxen, and work with them on both claims, and for every day that I used them on my place, I was to give him one day of my own labor and that of the

team also. So, accordingly, Mr. Kingham returned to his work, and I started homeward with the cattle. This was altogether a new experience for me, for I had never had anything to do with horses even, save the few days whilst hauling hay in Columbus, much less an unruly yoke of oxen. They were large cattle, one especially, which answered to the name of "Jack;" the name of the other was "Dick," a good-natured fellow.

Although we were now in the month of March, winter weather still lingered with us. There was a good deal of snow in places, and it was too cold to ride much, so I walked the greater part of the journey. That night I got as far as the Indian reservation. The next morning I set out again on the road, and it was exceedingly tedious creeping along beside the oxen at a "snail's gallop." This was quite a contrast to the double-quick gait I was compelled to make behind old Mike's mail-wagon in making the trip the other way. By the time I came up near Boone it was beginning to get dark, and just before striking the creek I had to pass through a narrow, but quite deep, ravine. The banks on either side were very steep and slippery, and in making the descent the oxen went down with a rush. I had no way of checking them; neither did I know, without first thinking it out, what was meant by the words "haw" and "gee." However, everything kept right side up, although it looked as if the frail box would be shattered to splinters. But it was not so easy to get out onto the opposite bank, for the roadway was frozen hard and was icy. The oxen reached about half-way up when they lost their foothold. They scratched and clawed heroically trying to regain a hold; but, failing to do so, back they went into the bottom of the ravine. I tried them again and again, but they failed each time.

As the trucks backed down the hill they ran to one side, and the wheels cramped, and came near tipping over the whole affair. Then I tried in a gentle way what effect the whip would have, and then coaxing and petting; but to no avail. Darkness was fast closing in about me, and it looked as though my chances were good for spending the night there. What next could I do? Thinking for a moment, the idea came to me to take the team onto the top of the bank, and fasten the chain to the end of the wagon tongue, and try them that way. But I failed again in that, as the chain was too short. I had not thought of it before, but it now struck me that I had a piece of large wire in the wagon that I had picked up in Columbus. So, fastening this to the chain, I soon had the satisfaction of seeing the hind wheels clear on top of the bank. This delayed me more than half an hour, and it was now quite dark. I was yet about nine miles from home, and the night was growing colder all the time. The oxen, too, seemed to be getting fagged out, and made slower progress than ever, so that these were a wearisome nine miles of travel, as I walked all the way.

Just before starting out from Columbus, I met a man from Albion, who was then living in the little frame building and keeping a few little articles of groceries. He asked me if I would carry along a barrel of salt and a few other little articles, and these I had to unload when I arrived at the place. The man had been in bed some time; but I roused him up, and we got the things into his room. I had yet two miles to go, and it was between twelve and one o'clock when I reached home. The folks were expecting me, and had staid up later than usual; but, finding that I did not come, had gone to bed, having given up my coming that night. They heard me drive

up to the house, however, and it was only a minute or two before Edgar was out helping me take care of the oxen.

Our separation had been only of short duration, yet it seemed good to get back to the family in the old sod house. It is just as true as it can be, as that good old song says, to those, at least, who are strongly attached to their home, "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." This, at least, has always been my experience.

CHAPTER XIII

The Big Blizzard of '73

DURING my absence the county commissioners had let a contract for building four or five bridges at different points on Beaver Creek, and almost as soon as I arrived home I went to work helping to build them. The contractor, whose name was Boyd, put up a temporary board shanty for the men to stay in. Here we cooked and ate our meals, and slept in bunks like those in the steerage department of a ship. I usually tried to be at home on Sundays, but for some reason, when working on the Albion Bridge, I did not go home till Sunday evening. It began to rain a little, and I thought it might be well to go home and see how the folks were getting along there. Had I not gone then, there is no knowing what the consequences might have been. One of the neighbors, who was acting as cook for the camp, and lived up the valley beyond our place, walked home with me. As we were going along the rain began to come down harder, and by the time we reached our house we were getting a heavy rain. This was the 13th day of April, and was the ushering in of that never-to-be-forgotten blizzard of blizzards of 1873. The rain continued to pour down; but during the night it turned to snow, and the wind blew a perfect gale, and it turned freezing cold. The storm came directly from the north, and when we got up the next morning, the south window, which reached nearly

to the roof, was completely blocked. Opening the door, this also we found blocked ; in fact, the whole south side of the house, clear onto the roof, was covered with a big bank of snow, and extended away out several feet. Not being able to look out on this side to find out what was going on in the outer world, we went to the door on the east side—almost all the sod houses had only one door, and a dugout never more than one—and, on opening it, O, what a sight! if, indeed, it could be called a sight; for you could n't see your hand held at arm's length, the air being so full of snow, almost as fine as flour, drifting furiously along, and the wind keeping up an incessant roar. It was truly fearful ; and even now, whenever my thoughts are set on that memorable storm, I experience a feeling of terror. The wind itself was so peculiar. It was different from any I have ever known before or since. It usually came in gusts, or with tremendous force for a few moments, and then lulled a little, keeping up these variations. But with this storm there seemed no easing up for a moment, but one uniform awful force for three days and four nights, and through the minutest crevice the fine particles of snow found their way. Somebody has said, "There is no new thing under the sun; but that which is done is that which shall be done." Now, I do n't know, but it seems to me that nothing like that storm will ever occur again. In all the years since that time there certainly has been nothing that could be compared with it. Coming as it did after the settlers had commenced the spring sowing and planting—what little there was done—no one would even dream that such a storm could possibly be, so no one was prepared to meet such an extreme emergency. But even if such a thing had been expected, or known for a certainty, the time had

been far too short for the settlers to have made any kind of adequate preparations in such a case. Had the country been more thickly settled, as in later years, and with more stock scattered about, bad as it proved to be under existing conditions, it must have been a hundred-fold worse.

In the one or two days that intervened between getting back from Columbus and going to work on the bridges, Edgar and I yoked up the cattle, and drove up to the "Oaks," and got a load of wood. And luckily we did, or we would have been without fuel during the storm.

The reader can not help noticing how often the expression "Edgar and I" is used. It is on account of the fact that he almost invariably accompanied me on my journeys to get wood, to the mill, to Columbus, or elsewhere. Other men would usually go in companies of two or more, but we almost always went by ourselves. He was a boy full of ambition, active, and intelligent, and was of untold help to me. He possessed the faculty of taking things into his own hands, although so young, and conducting them properly and successfully. In some way, it seemed that we were more like two very companionable brothers than father and son; and in many respects, and to a large degree, our experiences were the same; for he took great interest in all our affairs, as did they all, though but children, and we had no secrecy in our family affairs.

But let us get back to the storm, for we will have a hard time of it before we get through. We have already stated that we opened the east door and looked out; for the wind, coming from the north, had kept that side of the house clear of snow. "What can we do?" we said; "for the oxen are out there tied to those old trucks, and

have been in that awful situation all night, and if they remain there longer they must certainly perish. In fact, this may already be the case." It was the greater surprise that it was not so. I am telling this more than twenty-nine years after the occurrence, and as I think of those poor dumb brutes out there all through that long night in that awful situation, my flesh feels as though myriads of some minute animal were crawling all over me; and, as my scalp contracts and draws tight about my head, my hair stands up straight. So it seems, at least, for if it is not so, I feel it all the same. But there was no time to debate the question as to what we should do; if we were going to do anything at all, it must be done at once. So, quickly slipping on my "pilot jacket"—a kind of short coat, or long jacket, of very heavy and excellent material—and pulling my cap down over my ears, I stepped out into the blinding snow, and Edgar followed. As soon as we got outside, the wind struck us in our faces, and it seemed as though our breath would be taken, and we had to turn our faces from the wind. It seemed more from instinct, than anything else, that we found our way to the oxen, for we could not even see the ground at our feet. They were only about thirty-five or forty yards away, but we had to go against the wind. But there was other danger; we had to go round the large and deep excavation we had made for a cellar, and we knew that by this time it was full of snow, and we were very liable to fall into it. We succeeded, however, in finding the oxen, and still alive, but shivering and shaking like a leaf. I tried to untie the ropes, but could not, they being frozen as stiff as a stick of wood. So, taking my pocket-knife, I quickly cut them: Taking one myself, Edgar followed with the other, and we man-

aged, some way, to find the house. The reader, doubtless, is wondering what we were going to do with them. What could we do? There was no other way than to take them into the house, if we expected to have the use of them some other day when the storm should be over, for they certainly could not endure the fierceness of such a storm but a little while longer. When we led them in, my wife was so scared that she hied herself away into one of the other rooms. And well she might, for the sight they presented was enough to frighten any woman. Being wet from the rain that came first, the snow had stuck to them, and as it accumulated it froze on them, so that they were covered completely with a coating of ice. As they walked along they looked as though they were encased in a coat of mail, prepared for battle. We put them in one of the small rooms, the one occupied by the boys as a sleeping-room. There was no door to the room, so we put a pole across the opening. After we had made them secure in the room, my wife ventured to come out from her hiding-place.

Having got the oxen sheltered from the cruel storm, now the cow, "Nellie," must have our attention. But dare we venture so far away? For she was down in the dugout, nearly two hundred yards off. Of course, all this kind of thing being entirely new to us, we did not realize the extreme peril we were subjecting ourselves to when we took the shovel and started out to find the dugout. Had we, like the rest of the settlers, had experience in such things, doubtless we too would have hesitated before deliberately taking our lives in our hands, as it were. After it was all over, however, we began to realize, somewhat, the situation. The way we got down there and back again seemed almost a miracle.

There was a passage-way leading up to the door cut in the bank, the walls being up level with the roof, and this, of course, was filled up with snow. We shoveled and shoveled, and the whirling of the snow in our faces seemed as though it would suffocate us. After shoveling for some time, and making no headway, the snow drifting in as fast as we shoveled it out, though loath to do so, we abandoned poor Nellie to her fate, little dreaming that the storm would continue to rage with such fury so long.

The next thing was fuel. We had only a little in the house, and having been away at work on the bridges, I had had no time to prepare any. Edgar had been able to chop what was needed during my absence. Fortunately, there was the greater part of the oak poles yet left, but they were out there close by the old trucks. But we must have fuel, for the thermometer had gone away down, and who could tell how long the storm might continue to rage. You could n't tell anything about such things in Nebraska in those days. So we both ventured out again, and repeated it two or three times, though contrary to the earnest entreaty of my wife, "O, do n't venture out any more!" We each carried a pole at a time. On one occasion, the last one, I myself came near drifting away with the storm. I was getting past the house, when Edgar, who was coming along behind, and who seemed to possess the greater instinct, intuition, or whatever it might be best to call it, called to me, "Come this way, father; you are getting too far." And, sure enough, though so near, yet so far away. After this experience, I thought it not best to risk any more. These poles we sawed and split in the house.

Happening to have a little old hay in a bedtick that

the boys used under their flock bed, this we emptied, and gave to the oxen; and, though only a drop in a bucket, as we say, it was the best that we could do. Opening the south door again—for there was no danger of the snow falling into the room, it had packed so hard—we filled the wash-boiler with snow, and melted it on the stove. By this means the oxen had all the water they would drink; but a very little satisfied them. It was more for something to eat that they were craving. As their blood began to warm up, the sheet of ice gradually loosened and fell away a little at a time. As they would poke their heads out of the doorway, casting their big, glossy eyes wistfully about, a great commotion all the time going on internally, and keeping up a continual rumbling, my wife was in constant fear, and would say, "O, I wish they would n't keep putting their heads out there so!"

As the hours and days and nights wore drearily away, we looked out occasionally to see if there was any abatement in the storm. One day had passed, and night had come, but with no change in the elements. Another night had given place to day, but they were so much alike that the difference, if any, could not be discerned. Tuesday morning had come, but still that never-ceasing roaring and raging haunted us. It was indeed a wearisome time, for the air outside was so densely filled with fine snow that the light was obscured. Moreover, the large window on the south being completely blocked, and there being but one small sash in each of the other two smaller rooms, we could scarcely see about us. We were afraid to use up the little oil that we had in the daytime, and so remained in semi-darkness. And thus another day passed, and still no signs of a change. Wednesday, the third day, had come, but bringing with it no relief, and

we began to wonder if the storm ever would cease. And when looking into the nearly empty flour-barrel, and remembering the otherwise scanty provision, we were more than ever forced to a realization of the perilous situation in which we found ourselves. Many were the messages that from time to time were sent heavenward, petitioning the Almighty to stay the raging of the storm. Some time during the night, as we lay there listening, we fancied that we could discern a slight change taking place; and, as time wore away, it was evident that the roar of the wind was growing less, and in a few hours more it had died away entirely, and all was still as death. Such a calmness! It seemed so strange and indescribable after the eighty-five hours of violent rushing and raging of the fierce elements. As we lay there on our beds, when we discovered that the storm was subsiding, will it be wondered at that a spontaneous "Thank God!" from all lips went upward? And especially may this be said of my wife, on whose lips these two words, so small in themselves, yet containing so much meaning, were ever ready to be sent on their mission in acknowledgment of the goodness of a kind Heavenly Father.

The reader will surmise, and correctly, too, that we did not remain in bed after the first streak of morning light had shot up into the heavens. As we looked out across the prairie and over the hills, the miniature particles of frost floating in the air fairly danced and sparkled in the glowing sunlight. But, much as this scene of enchantment called forth our admiration, we had no time to stand gazing, but must be about our duties.

After getting the oxen out of the house and giving them hay from the little stack close by, we hastened with all speed to the dugout to ascertain if we had a cow still

alive. Everything was covered completely out of sight, and the bank of snow extended some distance out beyond the entrance. The snow had packed so solidly that we had to dig it out in blocks. When we took away the door, O, what a sight! Could this be our "Nellie?" If we had seen her in any other place than her own dugout, we would hardly have recognized her. She was lank and pinched up, and altogether a pitiable-looking object.

Considerable snow had drifted in at the door, and she had tramped it down till her head almost touched the roof, which was quite high.

Looking around at the other places, we found that the chickens were all right, except that they seemed to be starving for food. But Bessy! What had become of her? The snow had filled up the outer pen to the top of the rails, and naturally supposing that she was buried under it, we went to work digging it out. But finding that she was not there, we gave her up as lost. There was but little snow on the level prairie, but wherever there was any little obstruction it had gathered into high banks and ridges. Dugouts and barns, in many instances, were buried out of sight. All the deep and broad ravines were full, level with the prairie, and the snow was packed so firmly that teams with heavily-laden wagons passed over it for weeks afterwards. Some time during the morning my wife was looking out at the south door—we had cut a way through—across the prairie to the southwest, and all at once exclaimed: "Look! What's that coming up there? It can never be our pig!" But, to our great surprise, surely enough it was our "Bessy." She was sauntering along just as leisurely as you please, but I presume it was on account of being too weak to get up any other kind of a gait. We traced her track, and found

that she had been lying on the open prairie, as I suppose, through the greater part of the storm.

After attending to all these things, we sat down to breakfast. But just as we were getting up from the table, a rap came on the door, and we called, "Come in!"—the customary way of admitting callers out on the frontier. It was our near neighbor, who lived less than half a mile away. Without asking any questions, we could plainly see that some heavy trouble was upon him, for as he began to tell his story his eyes filled with tears, and his lips quivered, and it took considerable effort to restrain his emotion. He had come with a sad tale, and for the purpose of soliciting our aid. It took only a few moments to learn that he had lost one of his horses, a cow, and a young heifer in the storm. They were in the stable, buried up under the drifted snow. And he had come to ask me to go down and help him dig them out and draw them away. This was sad news for us to hear, for we thought our own experiences pretty severe; but what little we had was all saved to us, though, of course, that must be attributed largely to the greater risk we ourselves had taken. The sod stable was at the head of a shallow draw, only about twenty-five yards away from the house, but the man never found his way there from the time the storm began, Sunday evening, till it ceased, Thursday morning. His wife and the rest of the family were not willing that he should venture outside the house in such a fearful storm, nor that he should attach a cord to himself, and go out that way—a means which many resorted to in the extremely perilous situation. As the snow drifted in at the open places and accumulated, it was tramped down, so that by and by the animals were forced against the roof, and, becoming prostrated, were

buried under the snow, and thus perished. So I went down with him, and took the oxen along, they themselves appearing to be more dead than alive, and hardly in a condition to pull anything. We had quite a job getting them out, for the snow had been tramped so hard that it was almost like chipping a rock. We drew them away into a hollow quite a distance from the house.

The country at that early day was very thinly settled, but still there was a good deal of stock that perished, and many of the people suffered. It is altogether impossible to describe the nature of the storm in a way that any one could realize what it was; experience could be the only instructor.

CHAPTER XIV

Religious Beginnings in the Far West

BEING anxious to sow the first five acres of breaking to wheat, I procured a plow and went to work "back-setting." This was the first plowing I had ever attempted. In fact, I had never touched a plow, only to unload them from the cars whilst working in the store at Columbus. But as the neighbors passed along they all complimented me on the "good job" I was doing. Edgar led the oxen with a rope; for I was afraid to trust myself to drive the team, with a long whip in one hand, and holding the plow at the same time. Having prepared the ground, one of the settlers let me have ten bushels of wheat for seed. I was to pay him a bushel and a fourth for every bushel received. When the grain was harvested and threshed, we found that we had fifty bushels of wheat. The other five acres of breaking we planted to corn; but the grasshoppers again this year did considerable damage both to corn and wheat, cutting the wheat off just below the heads.

This same spring we began to hold religious meetings in Mr. Dresser's sod house; they had moved out of the dugout into a new house recently built. Rev. Mr. Lowes, a Congregational minister living at Oakdale, in Antelope County, came over and preached to us every two weeks. Everybody—that is, those who were inclined

that way—attended these services, irrespective of denominational preferences. The Methodists also held class-meetings around about amongst their own people. Mr. Lowes and a few others of us being Congregationalists, these services in the old sod house formed a nucleus around which a Congregational Church was gathered. After about two months of these services, we began talking about having a Sunday-school. So a notice was given that a meeting would be held to consider the matter of organizing. For some reason, I was not at the meeting; but when the folks came home they told me that the organization had been effected, and that the school had elected me to be its superintendent. No one had consulted me in regard to the matter, and I was somewhat reluctant to take upon myself the responsibility of the office.

I find in an old memorandum book, in which are recorded the names of the scholars and teachers, that the date of organization was the 18th of May, 1873. And, being fully persuaded of the deep interest that would be felt by any who may have knowledge of at least some of the events here narrated, if perchance their eyes should fall upon these pages; and perhaps many others who have come into the world and have grown up to be men and women since that time, but have had stories of the early days told to them by their fathers and mothers and grandparents, I make fuller use of names, perhaps, than I otherwise would. So I will here give the names as recorded, though there were others there, mostly the older people, whose names were not recorded.

The Bible-class consisted of Mrs. Jane Sachse, Adda Francisco, Edgar Turner, Eva Dresser, James Hare, and Cora Crites, with Mrs. Dresser as teacher.

Arabel Francisco, Emma Dresser, and Ernest Turner made up the intermediate class, with Julius Brewer for their teacher.

I myself took charge of the three youngest, Hetta Dresser, Leonard Turner, and George Sachse.

Increase in attendance was quite rapid, on account of the school which had been started up Beaver Valley, in the "Chess" District, having disbanded, and many of its members enrolling themselves with us.

This old record would also go to show the extraordinary amount of rain we had during that spring and early summer. I remember one occasion especially, on account of the rather funny predicament in which I found myself. We were holding school on Sunday afternoon when a big thunder-storm came up, and, after it was over, we started to go home. The track was very muddy, and there was water in many places all the way along. And, having the advantage of quite a small foot, I had on a pair of my wife's low, thin, cloth slippers; for I had an idea, just at that time, that they would present a more respectable appearance than my own very much worn shoes. I had got the notion from somewhere that a clean and neat appearance about the neck and feet of a person had the effect of covering up a multitude of shortcomings in other respects. However, I had taken only a step or two when the thought struck me that if I had any desire to save my wife's slippers from utter ruin it would be a good idea to take them off, and walk home barefoot. I never could go barefoot as I used to see some of the men do sometimes. If I did ever attempt it, even only a few steps outside the door, I imagine I presented somewhat the spectacle of "a cat walking on hot bricks." I did manage to get home, however; for, being all mud and

slush, it was nice and soft to my feet. But to see me slip and slide and suddenly jerk myself into all kinds of grotesque attitudes in order to keep from falling as flat as a "Dutchplace" in the mud, must have been a sight to behold. And it was a sight, apparently, to all who were in our company, my wife included, though sanctified soul as she was. And, however much I may regret to tell it, that, although it was Sunday and having just left Sabbath-school, the situation was so ludicrous that it afforded the greatest fun for the whole company, myself excepted.

The question of the county-seat having been settled about this time, the little frame building spoken of so many times before was moved up near to the center of the town site, the first building placed thereon. I remember going down with the oxen to help do the moving. The heavy rains had washed out the bridge, and we—for Edgar was with me, as usual—had to go round to the upper bridge, four or five miles up the valley, to cross the creek. After the building had been raised and skids placed under it, a score or more ox-teams were equally divided and hitched to the skids, and drew it onto the lot.

At the same time they were making preparations to build a schoolhouse, and an old gentleman named Crites had the contract. As soon as the building was completed, we discontinued holding our meetings and Sunday-school in the old sod house across the creek, and occupied the new building. Of course, it was only a very small place; but, being the first and only public building, it served for all kinds of purposes—religious meetings, political, and otherwise—till the courthouse was built, a frame building about the same size as the schoolhouse. Although out there at the front, we did not allow our Sunday-school to "freeze up" in the winter as many schools

did. Of course, we would hardly have known what would be meant to talk about having a janitor to attend to things; so I used to walk nearly two miles, no matter what the weather, often carrying a little wood along to make a fire before any of the others got there, for there was no provision made for anything of that kind. But, being superintendent, I felt that the responsibility rested upon me to see after such matters. Or, even if it did not, I realized that, in order to keep the school alive, that was about the only way to do it.

The next building that was put up, soon after the schoolhouse was finished, was a small house built by a man named John Hare. "John," as everybody called him, was a harness-maker by trade, and used this building as a workshop and residence combined. The following summer two young men named Hutton and Robinson came in, and, upon their arrival, Hutton rented the building, and the two newcomers started a little paper, and called it the Boone County *Argus*. And from this little building went out over the country the first issue of the first newspaper published in Boone County.

There were some who used to think that "John" was a little peculiar; and maybe he was, for I presume that, as no two persons are alike, we are all peculiar, to a degree, to the rest of the world. One phase of John's peculiarity was the way he impressed the minds, and the feelings, also, of his acquaintances with his ardent friendship. Who amongst those who have had the pleasure of his acquaintance can ever forget being held in his friendly, viselike grip? It was a mixture of pain and pleasure, the pain increasing as the grasp tightened. I have experienced it myself many times; but then, I didn't mind it so much after the operation was over, for I knew so

well that it was "John's" way of emphasizing his friendly feelings.

I remember one Sunday more especially. We had been to Sunday-school—John was a strict attendant at all religious services—and he invited me to his house to take supper with him. So we walked across the prairie from the school, and as soon as we got into the house John went to work making biscuits. My manners were too polite to permit me to make any remarks, or even a vague insinuation; but when the cakes were placed upon the table, I felt pretty sure that my friend could hardly lay claim to be ranked as an expert biscuit-maker. After mixing the dough, John flattened out small pieces with his hands, and laid them on top of the stove. It was not long before they took on various hues; but not from the heat, as doubtless he supposed, but from the rust and black off the stove. The cakes were mottled and streaked on the outside, having somewhat the appearance of what the women call "marble-cake," and when he dropped them in rather a careless fashion onto the little home-made pine-board table, they seemed to be little more than half-cooked, and went down with a heavy, dull thump. Whilst the cakes were cooking, some slices of bacon were sizzling in a tin plate on top of the stove. Happening to have another plate besides that which served as a frying-pan, we each had one, and got along nicely. The coffee was extra strong, I remember; or, at least, that's what I thought it was, for it was just about the color of the stovepipe. I made a strong effort to show to my friend the best features of my courteousness, so as to afford him all the pleasure of my company I possibly could, as I believe it was a real pleasure to him. One of the dishes was wheat boiled whole, with molasses

for an accompaniment. This seemed to be a favorite dish with John; but, never having partaken of wheat in that fashion before, I ate very sparingly of it; for as soon as I saw what it was, I was strongly reminded of the very serious predicament in which my friend a little time before found himself after eating of the same dish. It was said—so the story ran—that the grain had not been sufficiently cooked, and, as he ate of it quite freely, it caused him to experience more than an uncomfortable feeling, and for a time his case was a little critical. Bearing this in mind, it served as a warning for me. Of course, to be polite, as people usually do, you know, I felt almost bound to say that it was very nice. This, no doubt, was the first meal participated in by an invited guest in the capital town of Boone County.

A few articles of groceries were kept in the building that we had moved up from east of the town site, first by S. D. Avery, and subsequently changing hands several times. The building up of the town for some years, till the railroad came in eight years later, was very slow indeed.

About this time we began to hold weekly prayer-meetings around at the different houses within a circuit of five or six miles. And these times, although having so much of hardship to contend with, seem to me now to have been amongst the most really happy years spent on the old homestead. Stiffness and formality found no place in these little gatherings; and as we sat around the room, it bore more the air of one united family in some humble home, nothing at all pretentious within the old sod walls. All seemed to be there for a purpose, to help others by their sympathy and prayers, and, in like manner, derive help from them, and from God. It was not always

an easy matter, perhaps, to tell of the trials that might be weighing one down, and to solicit the prayers of their sympathizers in their behalf. The short sentences that came from the lips of devout hearts, testifying to God's love and mercy, were a good deal out of proper form sometimes, grammatically considered; but we who were listeners, and God, above all, understood plainly enough, and knew what it all meant. We were not there to criticise, even if we knew how. These meetings were altogether different from those I have often attended in later years, where there seems to be so much of cold, rigid formality, and so little of humble and devout prayer and testimony. In many of the so-called prayer-meetings of these later times there seems to be little that would indicate to a stranger who might "happen to drop" in to the meeting that such it was intended to be; but he might rather take it to be a meeting almost solely for discussing some Bible topic. How strangely different seems to be the spiritual atmosphere inclosed with the walls of the magnificent church edifice and that of the old sod shanty out on the plains! Somebody has said, "The warmth of Church piety comes from fireside devotion."

There is much that might be said along these lines; but my purpose is to tell of things and the way we did them out on the Western frontier thirty years ago, and not so much of what people do nowadays. But great changes come about as time moves on, and new ways are invented to get to heaven as well as to some other places.

CHAPTER XV

Terrific Electric Storm, and a Narrow Escape

It seems to me we do not have the heavy, continuous downpours in these days that we used to have in those earlier times. At the time about which I am writing, we would have two and three days and nights of almost incessant rain sometimes. Our sod house, although so recently built, had become so saturated that it was unsafe to live in. The sod, in the first place, was little else than a mass of dirt—scarcely any roots in it to hold it together. There had been so much rain that the walls were wet clear through for a couple of feet or more down; and the water came through the roof, so that it was necessary to place tubs, pails, tin pans—anything that could be made use of—about on the floor, the beds, and other places, to catch the water. Not infrequently we found it necessary to curl ourselves up into a ball when in bed, in the form of a sow-bug, in order to escape the dripping water. The north wall was the worst, as most of the storms came from the north and northwest. To try and keep the rain from coming through, we had put more dirt on the roof; but this, of course, added more weight for the rafters and the walls to bear up. So pretty soon some of the poles began to crack, and then to break, which made it necessary to put props under them. The walls also began to scale off from the top, and that made the situation exceedingly dangerous. One night is

brought to my mind especially. It had been raining hard for a long time, and as it was drawing toward evening the rafters began to make a cracking noise, as if breaking, and the plates which lay on top of the wall were forced down by the many tons of sod and dirt, and were cutting into it and splitting it in two, so that portions of it began to fall away into the room. Night had come, but no signs of the storm abating. Who can imagine the experience of that whole night spent in extreme fear and anxious suspense, awaiting the dawning of the morning, as we watched the rafters gradually but surely sinking deeper and deeper into the walls? It seemed only a question of time when the wall must certainly split apart, and the whole mass come down with an awful crash. I was willing to, and often did, risk a good deal in unsafe places; but to attempt to go under that roof and shore it up would have been sheer madness. So there we sat around the stove, and as near to the south door as we could get; for, although it was springtime, there had been so much rain that a fire was needed. Leonard, the youngest boy, was lying asleep on the floor between the stove and the wall, there being only just enough room for him to lie, ready to be snatched up and all make our escape when the first warning came. Several false alarms during the night caused a hurried movement toward the open door. As we sat there hour after hour watching and waiting, and starting up suddenly at every little noise, time seemed to move so slowly that, apparently, the morning light had deferred its coming much longer than usual. But there was no other way, so we had to endure it. As soon as there was sufficient light that I could venture out upon the roof, I did so. Taking a hoe, I climbed upon the roof, and raked off the dirt from the dangerous part.

The two large pillars and other smaller posts that I set up under the roof were a good deal in the way in getting about, and gave the house inside still more of a barn-like appearance than it presented before. Of course, the rain made its way pretty freely through the hay and brush, and made it very disagreeable to get about; but, as there was no help for it, we preferred the mud under our feet to being buried alive under many tons of it from above.

Several serious accidents happened by the roofs of houses falling in, or the collapsing of walls, caused by so much rain. Some time a little later, a man was killed by the wall of his house falling in upon him whilst he was in bed. He was a bachelor, and lived alone, and it was supposed that he was asleep at the time.

We ourselves again experienced quite an exciting time with our nearest neighbors. It happened this way: Mr. Staring, not having a house on his claim, moved his family into the little sod house on our neighbor's place; the one we had built and lived in a little while. He had a wife and three small children. A little girl about ten years old, a daughter of one of the settlers with whom they had been living, was also staying with them for a day or two. There had been a great amount of rain, and the little sod house had had a thorough drenching already. One evening it looked as though we were going to have another big storm. There was a big lot of dirt on the roof, and, all soaked as it was, there must have been a tremendous weight on the walls. But we could see the man shoveling on more dirt. We were not deceived in our expectations, for during the night such a thunderstorm came up that was truly appalling. The lightning was terrific, and the crashing peals of thunder, coming in quick succession,

seemed to make the whole earth tremble. There was not a continuous play of lightning, as is sometimes witnessed in severe electric storms, but when a flash did come, it illuminated the whole heavens brilliantly, and then it was pitch darkness. Along some time late in the night, as we lay listening to the rain pouring down in torrents, and the lightning flashing in at the windows and lighting up the whole house as though it were day, we were startled by a loud and hurried knock on the door. "What on earth can it be?" we thought. It is impossible that any human being can be out in a storm like this, and in the middle of the night, too! But there was little time to think, for, before we could call out, "Who's there?" the most pitiful wail came shrieking and piercing right through the loud peals of thunder, "O, Mr. Turner, let me in!" We at once recognized the voice; it was that of our neighbor, Mrs. Staring. We knew that for a person, and especially a woman, to be out in the middle of the night in such an awful storm, with the heavens a blaze of light one minute, and the blackest of darkness the next, there must be something awfully serious the matter. The first thought that flashed through our minds, as quickly as the lightning that played outside, was that some one of the family had been taken suddenly and seriously ill. Almost as quick as the lightning itself, I was out of bed and had the door open. The woman stepped inside for a moment, just long enough to exclaim, as she gasped the words between her breath: "O—Mr. Turner—the house has fallen in—and Alice—" She did not stop to finish the sentence; but the terror-stricken woman darted quickly out into the darkness, and had disappeared almost before I could realize the terrible situation. The whole north side of the roof of the house, with all its awful weight, had fallen in upon

them, and the little girl, Alice, was buried under the ruins; and she had left her husband there working with all his might trying to rescue the child. How she made her way down to our place and back again I can not imagine. She told us, afterwards, that she struck a straight line for the house, as near as her judgment would guide her, crossing the five-acre field which we had recently plowed and sown to wheat, which, being soft from the rains, she must have sunk ankle deep into the mud at every step. She had nothing about her person save her night garment; and when she came back to the house, with her hair disheveled and her person bespattered all over with mud, she was truly a pitiable sight to look upon.

It took only a moment to slip on my trousers and to make my way as fast as I could to the house. I kept to the track, however, and even then had great difficulty; for, there being a slight ascent the water was rushing down with great force. When a flash of lightning came, it blinded me for the moment, and I could n't go on, for the night was dense blackness. And as the flashes came in quick succession, I would try to look ahead and take fresh bearings, and then run for a few yards, and in that way finally reached the scene of trouble. The woman was back when I got there. I could see nothing, save when the lightning flashed; but she and her husband, in their frenzy, had been wildly clawing away the dirt and rubbish till their hands were lacerated and bleeding, and had just succeeded, as I came up, in extricating the little girl. She had been pinioned by one of the rafters falling across her neck; but it so happened that there were two or three sacks of grain standing close up against the wall, and on these rested most of the weight of the fallen roof. Had it not been for these, it must have been sudden

death for her, and maybe for the rest of them, also. As they drew her out from the pile of stuff, and placed her limp form in my arms, both of them exclaimed, "O, is she alive?" It did indeed appear as though life was extinct; but soon I heard a slight gurgling in her throat. But this was no time nor place to be discussing the matter of either life or death, so I hastened home with my burden. All this time the rain was pouring in torrents out of the heavens, and the thunder and lightning was terrific, and seemed to be holding high carnival in the clouds above. As in going, so in returning, frequently I found it necessary to stay my steps for a moment that the pathway might be lighted up before me. What with all this, and the burden I was carrying, by the time I reached the house my breath seemed almost gone, and as soon as I got inside I placed my charge upon the bed. Edgar and his mother were both up when I got back, and had made a fire, and were getting water heated in case it might be needed; for my wife always exercised great forethought in all such matters. In a few minutes, Mr. Staring came in, carrying the youngest child, and his wife followed, leading by the hand the two other little children. As soon as he had set the child down, he started at once up the valley to inform the child's parents of the tragedy. He had more than a mile and a half to go, and as yet there had been no abatement in the storm. There was the ravine, too! and how he would cross that we could not tell; for we knew that by this time the water must be getting away up its banks. So it was with extreme anxiety we awaited his return.

As soon as Mrs. Staring came in, my wife gave her some clothes to put on, and the children were put to bed. The little girl still continued to breathe heavily, and with

that gurgling in her throat, but with closed eyes and as motionless as death, and we looked on, and felt that the case was hopeless. The child's life was hanging by a very slender thread; and the case being so critical, we thought it best not to tamper with it, and simply applied hot cloths to the chest and throat. It would be certain that their friend and neighbor, "Doc" Johnson, would accompany them. Johnson was not a certified doctor; for we had none in the county at that time. He had been an orderly to an army doctor during the Civil War, and in that way, and with a little reading, had "picked up" what he knew about diseases and medicine.

In about an hour, Mr. Staring returned, accompanied by the little girl's father and mother, and Johnson and his wife. The man had rushed on in the storm, now in blackest darkness, and again in the light of the electric display, with all the speed he could muster; and, coming to the ravine, he dashed through the raging waters, which were now waist deep. By the time they had hitched Johnson's team to the wagon, and had arrived at the ravine, the water had risen so high that the horses had to swim. It was an awful risk to run; but, when life or death is the question, human sympathy and love are so unbounded that often one life is sacrificed in the endeavor to save that of another. The danger at such a time is scarcely thought of, much less realized. The horses had been over the same track many times before, and so were allowed to pick their own way, and dashed through the mud and water at a great rate.

So far as the ill-provision of those things would allow, such remedies and applications as was thought best in the extreme case were resorted to, with a silent watching and waiting till the morning, when it was thought

best to carry the little helpless patient home, where it would be more convenient for the parents to care for her. Contrary to our expectations, the child recovered, and has lived to be a wife and mother.

Along during the summer months we would sometimes hold our religious meetings in the open air, in a grove down by the creek, "Clark's Grove," we used to call it. I remember one Sunday more particularly. Rev. J. B. Chase preached to us, and talked to us about Doane College. Mr. Chase was a Congregationalist, and was about over the State trying to help feeble Churches, and at the same time acting as financial agent for Doane College. This infant institution—for it had been born only a year before, 1872—was located at Crete, then quite a small village, situated in the Blue Valley about twenty miles southwest of Lincoln, the capital of the State. The college was named after the late Thomas Doane—"Colonel Doane," as he was familiarly called—who granted to the institution its first loan of two thousand dollars, and from that time up to the time of his death had been of almost inestimable service, not alone for his liberal aid financially, but also as a wise counselor in the conduct of all its affairs. Mr. Doane was generally looked upon as the founder of the college. Being almost a helpless babe, we may say, the college needed a good deal of fostering care and nourishing food, in the way of promissory notes and bank checks, or even hard, metal cash in hand, either small or great, which would be still more nutritious. And this was the kind of food the reverend gentleman was hunting for out here on the broad prairies, where there was little save the prairie grass, interspersed abundantly with resinweed and "shoestring." But the people being quite anxious to give a little help,

made promises, many of which, years later, it was found absolutely necessary to cancel.

Having now the use of an ox-team, I lost not a moment's time, when the breaking season arrived, to commence operations. Working all through the season on my own claim and that of our neighbor, I broke about sixty acres.

When the Fourth of July came round again, it would not do, of course, to pass over this National occasion and not celebrate, especially as we had made a feeble attempt the year before. But a few more settlers had come in, and we wanted to show to the "newcomers" how intensely patriotic we could be. And so, to make a little more of display, the two Sabbath-schools—the one up the valley, of which R. R. Chess was superintendent, and our own—met at the creek bridge, then marched in procession to Clark's Grove. Each school carried a banner, and in turn sang a song. I remember our school singing, as we made our way through the tall grass and weeds towering above our heads, "We are marching on to victory; lift the gospel banner high!" The banner was one of my own manufacture, and painted in colors; and the superintendent of the other school made the remark, "I was not aware that we had an artist in the county." But how much of this may be counted on the side of a joke, I don't know. However, there were several commendatory remarks cast at the little sheet of painted calico as it was held aloft to the breeze.

To show still further that we were making progress, M. J. Thompson was chosen chairman, and made a short speech. A few words also were spoken by Loran Clark, and we had some music on a small melodeon which had found its way into the county since the last celebration.

A song or two was sung, and then more singing by the Sunday-schools. Of course, the reading of the Declaration of Independence occupied an early place on the program. One or two of the small boys had in some way got hold of a few firecrackers, which helped amazingly to enliven the occasion. And so passed the second Fourth of July celebration in Boone County.

On our way homeward, I left my wife and children at the bridge, and went across the prairie to the little store and bought a scythe. The store was then kept by Loran Clark and a young man named Gamidge. Being anxious to save every cent of expense possible, I was intending to cut all the grass I possibly could by hand, as the charge for cutting with a machine was five or six dollars a day.

CHAPTER XVI

A Chance Acquaintance and a New Improvement

HAVING spent one day in the whole year showing our patriotism and honoring our adopted country, we felt that we could not indulge in another gala day for some time to come. So the next morning, I threw the scythe over my shoulder and made my way westward up over the hills more than half a mile distant; for here was a broad, shallow ravine, with a very heavy stand of grass—from two to three feet high. Here I swung the scythe from early morning till late at night for several days. Others would cut a little in this way to feed to their horses as they needed it, but never in that way attempted to cut a quantity to stack for future use. “There’s too much hard work about it,” they used to say; “and it does n’t pay.” But I have often felt the necessity of doing things that have been neither easy nor pleasant, nor paid very much.

Now the Congregational folk began to agitate the question of organizing a Church, and it was decided to call a meeting and arrive at some conclusion about the matter. So we met in Mrs. Rice’s little shanty, and it was decided that the organization be effected as soon as possible. And when the time appointed arrived, it found a little handful ready to enter into covenant with one another and with God in laying the foundation on which to build what has been known ever since as the Albion

Congregational Church. There were six of us, as far as I remember, who joined as charter members. The names are as follows: Mrs. Dresser, Julius Brewer, Harvey Maricle, Mr. Cross, John Turner, and Mrs. E. Turner. Rev. Mr. Lowes, who had been preaching for us, was present, and Rev. Julius Reed, of Columbus; and also Rev. O. W. Merrill, State Superintendent of Home Missions, who succeeded the Rev. Reuben Gaylord, the old pioneer missionary, who first brought Congregationalism into Nebraska. "Father" Dresser was also present. The officers elected were: For Church clerk, Mr. Brewer; for treasurer, Mr. Cross; and John Turner, deacon. As stated in another chapter, we continued to hold our services in the sod house until the little frame schoolhouse was built on the town site, when we moved over there, both Church and Sunday-school. At this time there were only a trifle over forty Congregational Churches in the State, but now there are over two hundred. Few of the organizations had places of their own to worship in, and so held their meetings in schoolhouses, sod houses, dugouts, and almost any place where the people could assemble together. And even three years later—1876—when there were eighty Congregational Churches in the State, less than one-fourth had houses to worship in. And to give some idea of the discomforts and hardships that many of the pioneer home missionaries and their families shared with the settlers, I will simply state that at the close of this year, 1873, there were only four parsonages in the whole State. I am speaking simply of the Congregationalists. Consequently, many whose field of labor was on the broad, open prairie, and covering a large territory, were living in places not much better than holes in the ground. And

not being the owners of these, even, they were often driven from one place to another.

Harvest had now come, and there were a number of small patches of grain to be cut. The two Myers brothers, "Hank" and "Need," had an old reaper that they had brought out with them from the East—the only machine in the neighborhood. So I arranged with them to cut my five-acre "patch" of wheat, and in return for this, I worked for them, binding and shocking. We went around to different ones, helping each other, and so squared our accounts in that way. Having had a little experience the year before, I had no fear now about "keeping up my station." But I was not allowed to stick to binding all the time; for when on the Myers's place, they wished me to do the shocking. "For," said Need, "I can see, when you set up the bundles they don't tumble over in a little while; and the rows, too, are all so straight and nice. I like to see them that way!"

The grain being all cut, now came the stacking. But having only five acres of our own, this took only a short time. But on laying the foundation of the stack, this being my first attempt, I made it almost twice as large as it should have been, so that we had to "top it out" with a big load of hay. I remember the instance so well on account of some old acquaintances having considerable fun over the dumpy-looking stack at my expense.

Our neighbor, Kingham, came along just at this time, and two other men accompanied him. One of them had come from England several years before, and was at this time engaged in business in Chicago. The other had recently arrived from England. He went out West, and settled for a time in Cheyenne, Wyoming Territory, and followed his trade of builder and contractor, and then

moved to Chicago. We were all acquainted with one another in the old country.

These two men had come out for a ramble over the country, and a short visit with us at the same time, and seemed ready for a little fun of almost any kind. And as Edgar and I were at work building the stack, there they stood, laughing and joking. One said: "What kind of a thing on earth are you trying to make? I can do better than that myself. You'd better let me come up there and show you how to do it!" Neither of them, I presume, had ever been so near to a stack before in their lives. So I told them that I rather preferred to do my own building; and although not a contractor by profession, as was one of them, I was trying my hand at contracting, but feared bankruptcy on account of lack of material. And so we laughed and joked; for we understood one another perfectly. Both men had got to be quite corpulent since I knew them in England. When night came, we gave them the boys' room, both occupying the same bed. Along some time in the night, all of a sudden there came a great crash, with such an intermingling of shouts and laughter as you never heard. All this racket came from the room our friends occupied. What could it all mean? Something surely had happened. And yet it could be nothing serious, judging from the way our friends were behaving themselves. However, I jumped quickly out of bed and went to their room, and behold! what a sight! Their combined weight had broken three or four slats in the bedstead, and there they lay, one on the other, having rolled to one side; and all the time laughing as though their sides would split, and apparently quite helpless. As soon as they were a little composed, I wanted them to let me "fix up"

the bedstead so that they could lie more comfortable. But no, they would n't let me do anything of the kind. "For," said they, "the bed is all right, and we could n't have anything better." Then they would burst out again in another fit of laughter. There was little more sleep that night for any of us; for they seemed to enjoy the situation. I had not thought of it, but it came to me after, that it may have been the fleas that were the cause of all this uproar and routing, and breaking down of the bedstead. And if it was, there certainly was nothing wonderful about that.

After staying around two or three days, they returned again to their homes. The little time they were here they seemed to enjoy frontier life amazingly, and insisted on riding fifty miles to Columbus on those old threshing-machine trucks behind the oxen. So when all was ready, old "Jack" and "Dick" were hitched up; and, in all, six persons crowded into that little box nailed onto the old trucks.

My wife had been invited by acquaintances at Columbus to pay them a visit whenever it might be convenient; so she too went along, and took Leonard with her. He had an eruption, or breaking out on his legs, and they were very bad, and we thought it was poison. So his mother took him along, thinking she might get advice from the doctor there, and at the same time spend a few days with friends. Edgar went along, to drive and take care of the oxen. After a day's stay at Columbus, Edgar returned, and his mother, with the child, remained two weeks or more visiting.

During their absence, Ernest and I had the pleasure of making a new acquaintance. One day, as it was drawing toward evening, a man on horseback drove up. One

of his legs had been taken off near the knee, and a wooden substitute was strapped to the stump. He had come from his home near Oakdale, in Antelope County, and turned in to ask if he could stay with us that night. I said to him, "If you can put up with the kind of accommodation that we have, you are perfectly welcome." "All I care for," said he, "is simply a place to stay." The man's manner was such that Ernest seemed to take a liking to him right off, and accompanied him down across the ravine, where he picketed his horse for the night. I found, during a pleasant conversation after finishing our supper, that he had been in the Civil War, and as a result of that terrible conflict, was left with only one leg to plod his way through the world. When it came time for supper, I boiled some potatoes and fried some salt pork, etc. But as I come to think about it now, the "etcetera" did not account for much. However, I made the table present as neat and enticing appearance as I knew how—especially with a clean cloth. I felt a little like flattering myself, and to think that it was not altogether a failure when taking into account the terribly lean condition of the pantry about that time. When our friend stopped eating, I urged him to take more, to "try and make out a supper." But he said, "I have had a splendid supper, and would n't wish for anything more or better." But people do not always say exactly what they mean; or, better perhaps, do not always mean just what they say. I have been in the same embarrassing situation myself many a time. I rather think that the part about it that was "splendid" was thrown in extra, as a compliment, though unknown to him, testifying to my acknowledged ability by the housewives all around as being an excellent cook.

After supper was over, we had an hour's pleasant chat, during which our guest told us some interesting stories of his experiences during the war. When near the time to go to bed, leaning over, he took the leg of his pants in both hands, and, with a kind of twist on his face, looked at me—rather shyly I thought—and said, “Do you have any fleas about?” I said to him, “Well—yes; I guess we do keep a few around; but I hope they will not deprive you of having a good night’s sleep.” Doubtless, from the wry face he was making, he had already received forcible intelligence on that matter, and so was a little fearful of what might be in store for him. For when he got up from his chair to go to bed, he suggested that, as the weather was very warm, it might be more pleasant to go out and sleep on the haystack—one that was partly built. To this I made not the least protest; for I pretty well knew what the result would be if he staid in the house. So I gave him a couple of quilts, and Ernest, having already taken a fancy for his company, wanted to go too. When they came in the next morning, they said they had spent a real good night, and had slept well. I had not the least disposition to doubt their word, especially when the thought of the awful experience that I had passed through flashed through my mind. For breakfast I contrived to have a slight change. So, in addition to what we had the night before, I made some cornmeal mush; and this seemed to agree with our friend, for he ate heartily of it. When about ready to start away, he insisted—or at least tried hard to do so—on paying for the small service I had rendered him; but never having accustomed ourselves to treat a casual guest in that way, I just as persistently refused to accept anything; for I felt it a pleas-

ure, rather than a hard service, and was myself benefited, although not exactly in the same way, perhaps, that he was. I invited him to stop on his way back and stay with us again. My experience has always been that we never lose anything by our kindly treatment of others. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days," in this single instance was verified time and time again in the years that followed, as will be seen as we proceed.

We had been talking about the scarcity of timber, and the difficulties of procuring wood for fuel and other purposes; and having mentioned that we would have to build a new house in the fall, he said that if we would go over to his place some time, he would take us where we could get poles and other timber to build with. After this our acquaintance grew stronger, and the "Kings"—for that was their name—were always glad to see us whenever we were over that way. As well as going there to get wood, we used to go beyond to Oakdale to the flour mill, and usually staid with our friends overnight.

We used sometimes to go up to the "Oaks" and pick up brush; for all the trees had disappeared before this time. Settlers came from all parts of the county, and from adjoining counties also, the little time it lasted.

What we did had to be done in haste; for there was so much ahead of us that we felt compelled to do before winter set in. The completion of the cellar and the building of a new house were especially heavy jobs. And besides the work on our own place, we did considerable away from home. The finishing up of the cellar being as important as any, we commenced on that first. For the roof of such a structure it would be necessary

to have timbers of large dimensions; for the amount of earth and other material required to keep out the frost of winter, the heat of summer, and the rains of spring and fall would be enormous. And so, for a ridge-pole, we felled rather a large elm-tree, trimmed off the branches, and "snaked" it up and put it in place with the oxen, making use of the large limbs for rafters. Covering these with the brush cut from the limbs, we then piled on two big loads of hay and any old dry refuse we could find, and over all this a large quantity of dirt. As a final touch, both to make it more complete and to add an improvement, we placed a layer of thick sod over the entire roof.

We had a few potatoes on the place that year, and obtained a few others by digging them on shares for two other persons, taking a fourth for our share for digging and gathering up the whole crop. It was small pay, certainly; but in this way we secured seed for another year. So I was anxious to have a place to keep them; and although the question was sneeringly asked a year before, "What are you digging that big hole for?" we completed the job not any too soon to receive the little stuff we had to put into it. Although the grasshoppers had been bad, we had managed to raise a few onions, beets, and white beans, besides the few potatoes.

Up to this time we had done nothing towards building the new house, and were almost quaking with fear lest we be compelled to live another year in the old ruins in such great peril. But when an opportunity presented itself whereby a dollar or two might be earned, it was hard to turn it away; for the cents, much less the dollars, were so few and so far apart. And so, with the expectation of procuring just a few of these precious

dollars, I agreed to build a little sod house for a young man named Prescott. Mr. Prescott was a schoolteacher, and taught some in the schools at Columbus at the time, and was a fine, Christian young man. But like every other newly-settled country that I have known anything about, there were always some of the shark nature, watching for opportunities to prey upon innocent settlers and rob them, even of their homes.

At the time of the great rush and excitement in the opening and settling up of the northwestern corner of the State twelve years later, the settlers discovered themselves in a veritable hotbed of these bloodsuckers. I could tell many a tale myself, how innocent settlers have been cheated and robbed, and even compelled to go to the bank and borrow money to satisfy the greedy lusts of these vampires in human form, preying upon their fellow-men. Mr. Prescott had a homestead in Beaver Valley, and contest papers were filed against it—had his claim “jumped,” as it was called—alleging non-fulfillment of the homestead law. The case was brought before the Land Office officials, and decided against him, and he lost his claim; for false swearing seemed to be mere fun for the sharks and their accomplices. The claim then fell into the hands of a young man then working in a livery barn in connection with the “Clothier House” at Columbus, and who, soon afterwards, held the office of sheriff of Boone County.

CHAPTER XVII

"New Year's" in the New House

HAVING made the needful preparations, we drove down the valley, taking along the necessary tools; the house that we were going to build being quite small, only ten by twelve feet. One day, about the middle of the afternoon, as we were working away as fast as we could, anxious to get to work on our own house, all of a sudden the sky became darkened, and, looking up, we saw the smoke from a prairie-fire three or four miles away to the northwest. Soon the ashes came flying over our heads and settling down about us, for the wind was blowing briskly. Looking for a moment, we wondered how it would be with the folks at home. For the fire must certainly be in Pleasant Valley, only a short distance beyond the house, and there was little or no protection; nothing to hinder it from sweeping away everything. There was very little breaking done at that time, and the fires would come in their wild fury and lick up all that might lie in their path. The two youngest children and their mother were there alone. Her health being frail, and being unaccustomed to such scenes, we feared that she might crouch in some place of supposed safety, and yet might prove a very death-trap. As these thoughts flashed through our minds, we quickly tied the oxen to their lariats, and left them on the prairie. The smoke was getting more dense, and the fire even then must

have been near the house. So on we went, running nearly the whole distance, only easing up a little when our breath failed us. When coming up out of the ravine near the house, we saw the two children and their mother coming down off the hill in the west. The prairie had burned all around and very near to the house and the haystacks. Had the wind kept the direction it was in when we first started for home, there could have been no hope of saving the stacks and what other stuff there was scattered about. Fortunately it veered to the northeast, and so made it easier to steer the fire away from the stacks. It was almost invariably the case when a fire came, that a wind would be created at once, though there may have been none before. When they came up to the house, we were surprised to learn how heroically the frail woman had acted. She would have looked very pale as she stood there, all trembling and exhausted, had it not been that the ashes from the burnt prairie covered her perspiring face. Her dress had caught fire, and altogether she presented a sad spectacle. When they first saw the fire coming down the valley the wind was blowing but slightly; but she was afraid to do anything other than to watch it very closely, until it came so near that she felt that something must be done. She had heard us talk a good deal about "setting a back-fire," but as to understanding anything about what that really meant, I supposed she knew but little. But she must have had some idea about it, for she said: "Seeing that I dare not wait any longer, I ran to the house and got some matches and an old sack, and then went a little way below the stacks to burn a little around and then beat it out. Ernest and Leonard kept close by me all the time. For I was afraid that after I got the fire started, it might get away from

me. Telling Ernest to watch, I struck a match, but trembled and felt so afraid that I blew it out. 'O, but I must do something! for it is coming nearer and nearer,' I said. So I struck another match, and this time put it to the grass—or I trembled so that it fell from my hand, and it lighted up all in a moment. And although there was only just a little wind before, a sudden gust came, and the fire flew away from me; and it so frightened me that it seemed I could do nothing. I did work hard though, and tried to beat it out; but it gained on me so fast that I was obliged to let it go."

She had followed the fire, beating it out all the way along, up over the hill beyond the west line of the claim half a mile away. Her dress had caught fire, and she was not aware of it. And had not the children been with her, the consequences might have resulted very sadly. But as it was, what with the excitement and overtaxation of physical strength, she was prostrated for several days afterwards.

When we went down again the next morning to work on the house, we found the oxen and everything just as we had left them. We had only a little more to do to complete the walls, and then to put on the roof, when the report came that the claim had been contested. The young man not being inclined to put more improvements on the land till he should see how the case would finally be settled, no more was ever done to the house; for, as the reader has already been told, the case was decided against him.

Having rid ourselves of this job, we set to work at once doing something towards our own new house; for it was getting well along in October. The first thing was to get ridge-pole and rafters, and material for door and

window frames; for we intended to hew the framing stuff out of logs.

As our newly-made friend in Antelope County had invited us to go over there and get wood, we prepared to make the trip. Having made everything ready the night before, we were a good way on the road before daybreak, and arrived there toward evening. When supper-time came, Mrs. King, whom we found to be equally pleasant and obliging as was her husband, would accept of no excuse but that we must take supper with them. They were living in a little frame house of one room—simply boards nailed onto the studding. When time to go to bed, we spread our blankets on the floor in one corner of the room quite near to the stove; for the nights were already getting quite cold. But before retiring, a small Bible was taken from a little shelf nailed to the side of the building, and handed to me, with a request that I read a portion and offer prayer. I confess that I was made a little timid by this request, and yet I felt glad to have the opportunity; for I felt that we had indeed a good deal to be thankful to God for in providing such a home for the night and friends so true. Whether they were accustomed to engage in family worship I am not able to say; but they were professing Christians and members of the Congregational Church. I noticed, however, that whenever we staid with them after that, which was quite a number of times, I was always called upon to perform that sacred duty. They were aware that this was our wont in our own home; for our friend had seen evidences of that when staying with us one night.

Starting out the next morning, we found the timber down in the bottom by a little winding creek called "Little Cedar;" all about was thick brushwood and old

dead limbs of fallen trees tangled up together. When getting towards evening, and we were about to hitch the oxen to the wagon, up came our friend, on horseback. "As it was getting so late in the day," said he, "I was a little afraid that something may have happened." He having arranged the long, heavy pole on the wagon so that it would not scrape the ground when going through ravines, we started for the house, our friend riding on ahead. Supper was ready when we got there, and they were waiting for us to come up. Feeling that we could not conscientiously sit again at their table whilst we had food of our own, such as it was, our begging to be excused they would not listen to.

Having more than twenty-five miles before us, we were up betimes the next morning, and started homeward. As a good deal of the road was quite hilly, we made rather slow travel, and reached home only a little before dark. We had been from home three days, and on our return found things about as we had left them. And the first thing on entering the house was to see their mother gather the children about her and lead them away to the side of the bed, and there kneel and send a message heavenward in acknowledgment of the tender care which God had cast about "Dada" and "Edgar" during our absence.

I never knew any one so fearless as she to let it be seen that there was One to whom she looked and trusted above all others, and yet so free from any desire to appear conspicuous. Notwithstanding the best of all kindness lavished upon us by kind friends when away from home, it was always a glad time to be back again. The pleasant smile that always met us at the door, with the sincerely uttered words, never in a single instance

omitted, "Thank God, you've got home safe!" told us plainly how much more than welcome we were to enter again within the old sod walls.

There was no time to take things leisurely; so, after letting the oxen rest a day, whilst we worked on the poles, we started again to get another load. Some hours before daylight we were making our way up over the hills and up onto the ridge miles away to the north. Our friend's house stood a little off from the road, so we did not stop on our way out, but pressed right on for the timber. We went to work, and chopped and loaded our poles as quickly as we could, and started back, reaching our always welcome stopping-place a little after dark. Here we staid all night, and in the morning set out for home.

Having the necessary timber, there was nothing now in our way to commence building. Plowing about all the sod that we thought we would need, we stacked it up in piles on the ground, so that, in case the weather should change suddenly and freeze up, we would be sure of our sod. Having already described the method of building, there is no need of repeating it here.

After about four weeks of constant work on the walls, we were ready for the roof. First putting on a thick layer of earth on top of the hay, we then put on two layers of sod, the same kind as that put into the walls, some of that "wiregrass" sod, as we used to call it, and tough as a cocoa-nut fiber door-mat almost. The following spring, after the rains came, notwithstanding the sod being laid upside down, the grass sprang up all over the roof, and kept in that growing condition for a number of years. This ought to be strongly in evidence that it is not wise

to break prairie, except for building purposes, when the sap is out of the roots.

What, with one thing and another, making doors and hanging them, fitting in windows, etc., and, although we had no floor in the house, neither were the walls plastered, we were kept busy up till the last day of the year before it was ready to move into. Like the old year that had just died out, the first house, although having been occupied only a little over a year, had seen its best days, and was about to crumble and pass away. Why not, then, celebrate the ushering in of the new year by vacating the old and occupying the new? So, as soon as breakfast was over, it took but a short time to move the little furniture and other appurtenances from one place to the other. And thus we marked the advent of the new year, 1874.

The day was a delightful one—a day by itself. The sun shone out brightly, and it was pleasantly warm; neither was there a speck of snow to be seen anywhere. There seemed nothing to indicate that it was winter, save that there was no vegetation round about, and the limbs of the big elms away off in the ravine to the west were utterly bare of any signs of foliage. And to mark the day, though a little awkward to us the first few years, not being accustomed to observe "New-Year's" as a day of holiday and feasting, the "old English plum pudding," which was our custom to have on Christmas, for some reason was deferred till New-Year's. So on this beautiful morning the steaming water was making a terrible bubbling and sputtering around the plum pudding in the iron kettle over a hot fire. Christmas is the great day in England, and, although marked with feasting and good

cheer, it is held to be quite sacred; business is suspended, and services are held in the morning in all the churches of the land. The decorations are profuse with the red-berried holly, the dark-green ivy, and the evergreen shrub. Family reunions take place, and after returning from church they form a merry and apparently a happy group around the historic "old English plum pudding and roast beef." The rest of the day is spent in innocent amusement. The day following, which is called "Boxing-day," is given up to pleasure and sight-seeing. The streets in London would be alive with people, all bent on enjoying themselves. Some, however, as the day denotes, would be making their rounds and receiving their "Christmas box" from those to whom they may have rendered service in one way or another during the year. Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Whitmonday are also holiday seasons. On these occasions I usually took the boys for a ramble. We would, perchance, first make our way through some of the principal streets—Cheapside, for instance—a very narrow thoroughfare, and often so blocked with every kind of vehicle that sometimes it took hours to disentangle. Oxford Street, the Strand, Piccadilly, Regent Street, Tottenham Court Road, and other noted thoroughfares, we would traverse. I would let them see the Bank of England, Royal Exchange, and the Mansion House, all in close proximity. Then we would visit St. Paul's Cathedral, British Museum, Westminster Abbey, Houses of Parliament, and other places of note, and return by way of that magnificent promenade, the Thames Embankment; and on our way home would also take in the Old Tower of London.

This New-Year's morning of which I speak, the roast beef which had always kept so close company with the

plum pudding, till we came to this country, at least, was nowhere about; for, as I have before intimated, the name of beef had been almost forgotten. But in its stead we substituted a couple of roasts, or I should say, rather, baked chickens. And fortunately we did, for two boys, Sam and Will Riley, came up to spend the day with our boys. A young man named Robert Hare, a neighbor, and two other boys, Nathan Allen and "Will" Johnson, were there also. I remember how they were all out by the house, with their coats off, playing ball, and were enjoying, as they put it, "a jolly good time;" and, by the way the shouts went up, and the clapping of hands, there seemed not the least reason to doubt it. When dinner was ready—it was a late one, I remember, as was usual on all similar occasions—we all gathered around the table, ten of us in all, and there seemed to be no break in the "jolly good time." And I think we all felt the better for the little change the New Year had brought to us.

"The old year is dead, but a new year is born;
The old one closed his eyes at night, the young one woke at morn:
The old one taketh with him to the shadows of the dead,
The passions and the follies that to many griefs have led.
Let us forgive our brethren, and hope to be forgiven—
Flowers that have sprung with weeds have never rightly thriven;
And there are weeds, that, round the heart their biting tendrils twine,
And sap it of its virtues, and make it droop and pine.
Away with all such weeds from the garden of the heart;
Let the new year be our witness, that we play a better part;
Let sisters' arms around brothers' necks most lovingly entwine,
And children to their parents now more willingly incline;
Let neighbors be to neighbors more generous and just,
And all mankind look up and strive in Heaven to put their trust.
Then shall the new year be to all a happy year indeed,
And man from many sorrows and from many tears be freed."

CHAPTER XVIII

Assessing "Mad" Milan, and Indian Scare

To TELL of all the events as they occurred through the many years spent on the old homestead would fill several volumes. I dare not, therefore, attempt to give an account of all our doings and experiences. Let it be enough to say that the winter of 1873-4 was spent in the performance of the various duties that naturally come in the way of a life like ours out on the open prairies of a newly-settled country.

We were kept constantly busy through the cold, the snow, and the storms—storms which seemed to come more suddenly and with more frequency in those earlier times than they do now.

At the previous fall election I was elected assessor for Shell Creek Precinct. The precinct was a large one, embracing about one-fourth of the county. I had nothing except the old trucks and the oxen, so I started out tramping over the prairie on foot. The northwest corner of the county was settled almost entirely with Norwegians—an honest, thrifty class of people, though poor. I well remember, however, that one settler amongst them was an Irishman named Milan. He was such an eccentricity that he was known by everybody all around; and he was a desperate fellow too. They used to say that he was half-crazy, and on that account, I suppose, he was nicknamed "Mad Milan." He was continually quarrel-

ing with his neighbors, and seemed as though he would just as soon chop a man down as to look at him. I remember one time, at the sitting of the district court, before Judge Valentine, complaint was brought against Milan for cruelty to animals. He had been beating and cutting one of his horses with a spade. Some few years later he sold his land, and moved farther west, going to Colorado or Wyoming. It was not long after when rumor came back that he had killed a man, and that a mob had taken him and hung him to a tree—lynched him, as we now call it. Whilst he was living in Boone County there was considerable talk of doing the same thing. One day, when on my rounds, I happened to be in Milan's neighborhood, and it was near night when I came up to his house. It was a kind of half-and-half affair; not exactly a dugout, nor yet a house. It was quite large, however, and the back part was dug away into the bank, and the roof was very low—so low that I could no more than stand up under it. It was very dark, too, there being but one small window in the door at the front. When I first entered, I could not see what was in one corner at the back of the room, but could hear something routing about and making a kind of grunting; but after I had been in the room a little while, my eyes became a little familiar with the surroundings, and I could see, though but dimly, what was supposed to be a white pig. But, from the smoke or something else, it looked more like a black one. At first I could n't understand it, for I had not seen any black pigs anywhere around. It was a big sow, and had a whole lot of little ones. And now, as she stretched herself on the little handful of straw upon the ground, I need not any longer be in doubt as to what it was; for in a moment all the little ones began

to scratch and fight and squeal like little mad things. They, I suppose, like little children sometimes, were quarreling over the place each should occupy at the supper-table. I did n't at all like the environment, for the place, altogether, even if we leave out the pigs entirely, was most filthy; and there were several little dirty, ragged children about. I felt all on pins and needles, and was anxious to get to business and make my exit in short order. But Milan was an Irishman, it must be remembered, and one of that kind who talk all the time; he was a tremendous talker. I urged him to let me fill in the assessment blank. "For," said I, "I want to make another call before I close up my day's work." But he seemed determined to have me stay and take supper with him and his family—pigs and all, I suppose he meant. But I declined his kind and liberal invitation as respectfully as I felt capable just at that stage of the proceedings, though I had taken nothing since I left home early in the morning. So I again pleaded with him to let me have a statement of his personal property; but it was all of no avail, and he shot off again, like a ball from the mouth of a cannon, and began telling me all about his fine breed of pigs, his big pigs, and his little pigs, and all that. He then suddenly drifted away from the pigs, and began telling me about the rascally set of neighbors that he had; how they were all doing their best to drive him out of the country. What with his genuine Irish brogue, and the lightning rapidity with which he manipulated his tongue, I could not appropriate one word in a score that he uttered. I almost began to despair of ever getting myself cut loose from him. But I did at last succeed in accomplishing my mission, and lost not a moment in getting my papers together, and, grabbing up my hat, I

made for the door. But even then Milan would not desist from showering his favors upon me. He always did appear as though he wanted to be very friendly toward me. He again begged that I should stay overnight. "And," said he, "we will make everything as pleasant and comfortable for you as you could wish." But where and how for the life of me I could n't tell as much as the man in the moon, unless it might be a bed in the corner with his fine breed of pigs. My conscience may not have been quite as clear as it might have been about the matter, but if there was nothing at my command that I could see, I felt compelled to invent some way whereby I might free myself from the grasp of my fast friend, who seemed to show a strong desire to stick even closer than a brother. So I told him that I really must make one more call before closing up my day's work, but I might possibly be that way again shortly, when it might be more convenient to enjoy the pleasure of being his guest; and by this means I managed to break loose from him. I had taken nothing to eat since leaving home early in the morning, and felt rather to regret, all through the trying ordeal, that the surroundings were not a little more in accord with my natural, if not very refined, taste. If they had been, it would have taken no very strong urging to prevail on me to accept the hospitality thus offered.. Indeed, at that late hour in the day, and the feeling of emptiness that I was experiencing just about that time, I think it more than likely that I might have been the first to beg that entertainment be given me; especially after tramping over the rough prairie all day long; for I did not confine myself to the wagon track, but often made a short cut, up over hills and down through deep gulches, from one house to another.

It was now nearly dark when I left Milan looking out from his door and pointing me the way to the next house, about half a mile distant. I had never been in that neighborhood before, therefore knew nothing of what might be in store for me at the next house. But I hastened on, feeling sure that, whatever it might be, it could not strike me more unfavorably than the one I was fleeing from. Here I found a nice little sod house, with the walls plastered, but no floor, save that of Nature's own providing, and everything neat and orderly; and a little more so, I think, in this case, than might be expected in the home of a bachelor and pioneer on the wild Western prairie; for this man was the only occupant of the house, and a Norwegian. If I remember correctly, his name was Louis Nelson. The man was preparing his supper just as I came up to the house, and as soon as I entered and had taken a seat on a three-legged stool which he had proffered me—one of the man's own manufacture; for it seemed to be the custom of the Norwegians to make almost all the furniture they had in their homes out of rough poles or lumber; their wooden clogs, also, that they wore about the place, they made themselves—he at once went about cutting off more slices of bacon from quite a large piece that hung against the wall, and flung them into the frying-pan. He then fried some pancakes and some potatoes, and we both sat down to a little, rough-made table. Although not much in favor with salt pork, I did on this occasion eat a good hearty supper of cakes, pork, and potatoes, and coffee. When the time came to go to bed, he insisted that I should have his bed all to myself; and I could not prevail on him to swerve an inch from his purpose; but, taking a buffalo robe and some other things, he made his bed on the ground in one

corner of the room. He seemed to have the idea that I was invested with great power and authority, and was some superior sort of a person. I tried, however, as best I could to set him at ease. When we got up the next morning, the breakfast was simply a repetition of the supper the night before—a difference in name only. I felt amply repaid, however, for what it had cost me in the persistent pleading with Milan the night before to spare me and let me go.

I do n't know how it came about, but after I had been over almost the whole of the field, and was about closing up my work, it was found that a census had to be taken; and blank papers being furnished me for that purpose, I had to tramp the old trail over again. In making the rounds this time I was caught in what we called a "bad snowstorm"—the term "blizzard" being coined since that time—and was kept from home two nights. One day I was making calls away up on one of the branches of Shell Creek, and when night overtook me I found myself at the house of one of the Andersons. There were two or three of that name in the neighborhood, and they were brothers. It was a sod house, as usual, and there were two beds in the room, separated only by a kind of curtain. The family consisted of the man and his wife and a daughter about fifteen or sixteen years old. A young man with whom I was acquainted, named Julius Brewer, was teaching school in that district. The district had recently been organized, and they had built a little sod schoolhouse, and Mr. Brewer was boarding and staying with these people. It was near night when I called, and Mr. Brewer invited me to be his guest, and, of course, I very gladly accepted, my friend sharing his bed with me. It was a very lofty perch, I remember, five

or six feet high, on top of a lot of sacks of grain of some kind. During the night a storm came up, and the wind blew terrifically, and it was very cold. And when we got up the next morning there were several inches of snow on the level, and all about the house, the barns, and other places, great banks of snow had piled up. The storm kept up its raging all that day, and still continued when we went to bed at night, so that I was compelled to remain in the house all that day. I remember the breakfast consisted of cornmeal mush—which, of course, was no new thing to me—some fried potatoes, and some bread, and a very little butter. I had been accustomed to having a little, only just a little, brown sugar—I have not seen any like it for a good many years—and milk with my mush when at home, and this was the first time I had seen or heard of its being eaten with salt in place of sugar and milk. But, to do as the others did, and as there was so little else on the table, I tried a little of the salted mush. I could n't stand it, however, and the two or three spoonfuls that I did manage to force down cost me quite an effort. Some time during the night the storm ceased, and when we arose in the morning all was clear and bright, but almost as cold as midwinter. There were several inches of snow all over the level prairie, the ravines were full, and in other places it had drifted into ridges, so that I had a terribly hard time getting from place to place. What little tracks had been made across the prairie were now all covered up, and I might just as well walk in one place as another. Sometimes I was making my way up over steep hills, and then again scrambling through deep ravines, or through snowbanks up to my thighs. Before I set out on this second trip I little dreamed that the opportunity to call on my friend Milan

again would so soon be afforded me; so I was a little particular that my call be made early in the day, and just as well, perhaps, if during his absence. By so doing I might hope to be spared the pain of meeting him; and his wife, doubtless, would be equally competent to furnish me the information I was seeking; for I found that the women knew more about such matters than did the men, any way, especially with regard to the ages of the children. When I applied to the men for the information needed, they would almost invariably refer me to the wife and mother, saying: "O, you 'll have to ask the woman about that; she knows more about them things than I do!"

Having the little five-acre patch of sod corn, it was a means of supplying us with a little fresh meat in the way of prairie chickens during the winter just past. We used to trap them alive, and sometimes we would get from one to four or five in the trap at a time. Our usual way of cooking them was to bake them over a "Yorkshire" pudding. There being no fat on the prairie chickens, they are dry, and need a little fat of some kind cooked with them to make gravy; still, we preferred them to eating so much fried salt pork, as many of the settlers did, when they had it, at every meal. Almost invariably we ate mush and milk for breakfast, and nothing else, year in and year out, except when we had threshers about, or were having our grain cut in harvest-time, when we would have to board the men.

About this time there was considerable excitement amongst the settlers, for it had been rumored that Indians had been seen in the neighborhood. They were not the Pawnee tribe, however, who were our next-door neighbors—though not always "neighborly neighbors"—

but the Sioux, a warlike race, whose reservation was three hundred miles away to the northwest. Of course, it excited no curiosity to see an Indian; but they had stolen stock from the settlers, and were all the time in conflict with the Pawnees, frequently making raids on them, and seizing and driving off their ponies. The settlers were rather badly scared sometimes when it would be known that the Sioux had been down making their periodical visits to the poor Pawnees. There had been one or two horses stolen in our neighborhood, and it was supposed to be the Sioux who were committing these depredations right amongst us. Fearing they might have serious trouble, the settlers prepared themselves as best they could to meet any emergency that might arise. Any old shotgun, musket, or rifle—anything in the shape of firearms—was brought out and put in order. Some sat up nights to watch their places. If we were out on the prairie, or making a journey, we seemed to be watching all about us, and rather expecting that some of those redskins, with faces smeared over with war-paint, and heads plumed with tall feathers, might suddenly swoop down upon us and take our scalps.

I remember very well one morning when I was in the house, the boys came rushing in full of excitement, and cried out: "O father, there's an Indian going along up over our hill over there!" I went out and looked, and, sure enough, a man was there; he was walking along on the top of a ridge on the west side of the claim. He appeared to have a blanket wrapped about him and to be bareheaded; and, if that was really so, why of course he must be an Indian, and, no doubt, was prowling around for some ill purpose, we thought. He perhaps was looking down into the valley below, to find out what there

might be about—horses, cattle, or what not—and then, when night came, come down and drive them off, saying nothing about what our own fate might be. But the man was half a mile away, and I might be mistaken. But the ridge sloped now in another direction, and he was soon out of sight. Recent conflicts between the two tribes, and the horse stealing, had brought back to the settlers' minds the horrible deeds perpetrated by the Indians on the white settlers in other States in the north, Minnesota, for instance, only a few years before, that just then I may not have been very bold; but I felt determined, if possible, to find out something about who and what he was. So I went in a kind of zigzag, round-about way up over the foot of the ridge, going very cautiously, and stopping quite often to raise myself on tiptoe and peer over the brow of the hill, keeping well in the rear of his tracks, as near as I could tell. I had gone out in a hurry, empty handed, carrying no weapon of any kind. But there was no need of anything of that kind, any way; for when I had reached a position where I could see over the top of the hill, I saw this mysterious being still trudging along, mounting another ridge a mile away. So, after all, I failed to discover what kind of an object he was. Keeping within the bounds of not telling anything false, I did try to have my wife think, if not believe, that our fears were ungrounded, and that the object of our uneasiness was not an Indian looking for our scalps, after all. She made no assertion to the contrary, and said but little; but the way she looked fully convinced me that she was still capable of holding an opinion of her own, and that she would not sleep very soundly that night.

Some of the settlers were in such fear that three or four families congregated in the sod house of one of the

neighbors, and barricaded the door and windows with chairs, tables, and anything that would serve the purpose, and furnished themselves with guns, and any other kind of weapon that could be relied upon to kill and scalp an Indian. They sat up nights watching for the enemy; but I am not aware that an opportunity was afforded them to place on exhibition any scalps of the Sioux.

The settlers were still more terrified as from time to time reports reached them of conflicts between the settlers and Indians in other parts of the State. I remember that, soon after we came to Nebraska, a settler chopping wood down on the Loup River, near Columbus, was killed by the Indians. At another time, and not far from the same spot, an Indian was found who it was supposed had been killed by some of the settlers, and it was feared that serious trouble would arise in consequence. Then again, in the southwest part of the State, a man named Stenner was killed on Beaver Creek; not, however, the creek of the same name in our own county. Another man, whose name was Rawley, was killed down on the Platte, near Ogallala, in the western part of the State. The man had gone to Greeley for flour, but, failing to return, the settlers turned out and made search for him, scouring the country all around, and succeeded, at last, in finding him, but not until he had been dead some time.

Whilst I am engaged in writing the incident, my mind is carried back more vividly to those pioneer days of excitement and peril. Twenty-nine years and more after the event took place, I am sitting on the grave of a squaw of the Pawnee tribe who died from the effects of wounds received in an encounter between the Pawnee and the Sioux. It occurred early in the fall of '73. The grave is situated on the west bank of the pretty little zigzag

vale through which runs what is known as Coon Creek, a name given it by the Indians, on the west edge of the town of Indianola. I am accompanied by one of the old pioneer settlers of the country, who settled on Government land on which the little town now stands, and from whom I gather the rather pathetic story. As the heat is intense, the thermometer rising away above the one hundred mark, causing all vegetation to droop and hang its head, we choose the early morning to make the little excursion. As we sit here together on the grave, my informant relates to me a little of his own early experience, which began about the same time as my own.

A band of Sioux and a band of Pawnees were out on a buffalo hunt. They met, or came together, I might rather say, on the divide between the Frenchman and the Republican, near a little place called Trenton. The band of Sioux was ahead of the Pawnees, and neither seemed to be aware of the near approach of the other, or that they were anywhere in that part of the country, till the Pawnees, accidentally, as it were, came up to the Sioux. Being so deadly at enmity, as the two tribes always were, there needed nothing more than their simply coming together to precipitate a battle. But when it came to fighting, the Sioux, of course, were superior to the Pawnees, and were much better armed, and made deadly slaughter amongst them, killing about ninety—bucks, squaws, and papooses alike. "Men," said my friend, "were sent out from the reservation with teams and wagons to bury the dead and to gather up the wreckage that had been left on the scene of conflict." With other stuff that they hauled away, was a large quantity of dried buffalo meat bound up in hides, and also some that had not been dried, which tainted the whole atmos-

phere. "I wondered," said the gentleman, "why they carried that stinking stuff away."

The squaw over whose grave I am now sitting received two arrow wounds, one in the left breast, and another behind the left ear. Her papoose had been killed, and she was left, supposed to be dead. She revived, however, and somehow found her way to the house of a settler named Korn. A doctor was brought, but he could do nothing for her, as the wounds, being so long unattended, were in a dreadful state. She seemed to be suspicious that the doctors wanted to do her harm, and they could n't persuade her to be taken into the house. But Mr. Korn had a set of wagon-bows and cover, and these they set up by the side of the house, and placed her in it. My friend said: "I went, one day, with my wife to see the woman, taking our little girl along. As soon as she saw the child, she held out her hands towards her, and said, as plainly as she was able, 'Pretty girl! Pretty girl!' Then she would wail and cry bitterly, and say again, 'Kill my papoose! kill my papoose!' Then she would burst into crying again." She lived only two days after being brought to the house; for, going out one morning and looking into the tent, there lay the rigid form of the poor Pawnee squaw, life having gone out during the night. My companion, going on with his story, said: "Myself and another man made a box out of slabs and pieces of old boxes—anything that we could find about—and called it a coffin. Wrapping the body about with the red blanket which had done the same service for the living form many a time before, we inclosed it in the box, and carried it to this spot, and here laid her to rest. And this was the first grave in the county, at least so far as white men knew anything about."

Some years after, when other settlers came in, some of them, hearing of the "Indian squaw story," were somewhat skeptical, and translated it into another "fish story;" and, to convince them of its genuineness, my friend, with others, went out to secure evidence that would leave no doubt in the minds of the unbelievers. Finding the spot, they dug down only a little way when they came upon the skeleton. Taking out the skull, they carried it into town, and there exhibited it as being the best proof that could be given. They carried it back, however, and carefully put it again into its place. Mounding up the grave, they then hauled a big rock of several hundred pounds from across the river, and stood it up, rough as it was, at the head of the grave, just as it appears as I gaze upon it this bright, glowing morning.

Originally, the Pawnees resided in Nebraska, but extended into Kansas and Texas. They were at one time bold hunters, excellent horsemen, and fierce warriors, being in almost constant war with the Sioux, Tetans, Arapahoes, Sacs, and Foxes, and other tribes. But, by what I have seen of them, they must have sadly deteriorated. In the Minnesota campaign against the Sioux, in 1861, they took part with the Union army. After the war was over, however, the Sioux sought revenge on the helpless Pawnees, and they were compelled to dispose of their lands through the Government, and were removed to the Indian Territory in 1876. At that time they had so diminished in numbers that there were only about two thousand of them; and now, twenty-six years later, only a few hundred of them are left.

CHAPTER XIX

Perils Behind an Ox-team

THE Pawnee Indians used to come up from their reservation every winter and camp at different points along the creek for the purpose of trapping beaver and other wild animals. One of their favorite camping-places was down in the old cañon, about a mile and a half east of town. They would stay in camp several days, and work up and down the creek.

The beavers, as the phrase, "he works like a beaver," indicates, are very industrious workers. They work round and round the trunk of a tree, scooping out the little chips with their teeth almost as neatly as it could be done with a carpenter's gouge, till they reach the center, when the tree falls. I have seen trees along the creek seven or eight inches through, cut down by them. They build little houses of sticks of wood, rushes, and any old drift, and plaster them inside with mud. In doing this, they use their tail as a trowel, or paddle, which is flat and broad, and covered with a kind of scale. Their houses, or lodges, as they are sometimes called, are grouped together near the edge of the water, the mud being scraped away from the front, so that there may be a sufficient amount of water to allow free egress, even during the most severe freezing. The winter stores, consisting of heaps of wood, are always under water, at such a depth that they can not be blocked up in ice.

Having learned that a woman living in a little town called Schuyler, about sixty-five miles away, had two yearling heifers which she wanted some one to feed and care for "on shares," as they called it, and thinking that it might be a good opportunity to give us a start in raising a little stock, after the sowing and planting was all done, Edgar and I hitched up old Jack and Dick, and drove down there, and made arrangements with the woman to take them. We tied the heifers with a rope behind the wagon, and, the weather being very warm, we traveled slowly, taking six days to make the trip. We kept the calves till the agreement expired, and then made further agreement with the woman to buy the one that was hers. They grew and got along well, and each made us a present of a nice calf every year as long as we had them. But after a few years one of them died. Feed was very scarce, and she got down very poor, and was again about to make us another present, when she became so weak that she got down and could not get up again. We did everything that we could to help her and to save her life. We put up a framework, and, with ropes and quilts, made a sling, and suspended her so that her feet just rested on the ground. But, seeing that there was no hope, and thinking that it would be less painful for her to breathe her last lying down, we very gently lowered her onto a soft bed of straw. As she was about to die, my wife, whose sympathetic nature was so intense, even for the lowest form of God's animal creation that might be suffering, after repeated visits, came again into the little shed; and as she kneeled there, bending over the almost lifeless form, caressingly stroking with her hand the poor dumb animal's face, and saying, "Poor Fanny, I am so sorry for you; I wish I could help you," big, sympathetic

tears rolled down her cheeks, and could almost be heard as they fell upon the poor, motionless dumb brute, who seemed to understand the meaning of it all, as she gently turned her eyes, now pale and dull, up into the face of her sympathizer in acknowledgment. As we all stood there silently looking on at the heart-touching scene, the thought came to me: What, if such a thing were possible, would that poor dumb creature think to witness such a sight! And I thought again: How few such scenes occur in the world; and if all humanity could be here now, and rest their eyes on this scene, could there help but be a great transformation wrought in the hearts and lives of those who so cruelly abuse the lower order of God's creation?

I have known my wife, sometimes, when she has seen men ill-treating their horses or other animals, to go out to them, though weak and trembling perhaps, physically, her indignation so wrought up against such cruelty that she could not be restrained from administering a severe censure upon the offending one. And, although she had such a dread of some insects, especially the spider, she would not, if she could in any way avoid it, destroy the life of the smallest of them, except that of a flea. If anything of that kind disagreeable to her would get into the house, she would say: "O, don't kill it; get hold of it with something, and put it out-of-doors!"

A little incident comes to my mind which occurred about this time, and to which was attached considerable danger, as well as the excitement and fright it caused. It was Sunday morning, and we were going down to church, riding on the old trucks behind the oxen. When we had crossed the two ravines a little way down the road, the oxen darted suddenly to one side onto the prairie.

I happened to be sitting on the near side, with my legs dangling between the wheels, and Edgar was driving: he and his mother were sitting on the wagon-seat, which rested loosely on the boards. Springing from my seat, I tried to head them off—for they paid not the least heed to the repeated shouts of "Haw, Jack!" "Haw, Dick!" but did exactly the opposite, and wheeled clear around. They had now become excited, and were dashing as hard as they could gallop down through the tall grass and weeds into the ravine. Seeing that my efforts to head them off were more likely to do harm than good, I stopped chasing them. On they plunged, down into the bottom of the ravine, and up the steep bank close to where we had been washed out of our little cabin, up onto the ridge which divided the two ravines, still bearing away to the right, as though they were crazed. Ernest and Leonard had jumped off, or tumbled off, before they started to go down into the ravine. As the oxen clambered up the rough, steep bank in an angling direction to the top of the ridge, the seat was upset, and my wife was thrown upon her back, and lay stretched across the boards, whilst Edgar, with the grit and courage of a young lion, half lying down, half sitting up, was holding on with a firm grip to his mother's dress with one hand, and with the other to one of the stakes in the front bolster. In going up the steep bank, it seemed almost a miracle that the whole affair was kept from turning completely over, and a very serious if not fatal accident averted. The oxen still kept on up over the ridge and down into the ravine on the other side, and galloped on out of sight. Seeing the extreme peril in which Edgar and his mother were placed, as soon as the oxen started to go down into the ravine we immediately followed after them. But to talk of getting near to a

drony-looking old ox when his metal is up, you might as well chase the moon. But we ran on through the ravine and up over the ridge as fast as we could. We could then see that they were coming into the road again, and making towards home, but had slackened their speed, and seemed inclined to subjection. Edgar was just raising himself up when we caught sight of them, and with the command again given, "Whoa! Whoa!" they finally consented to come to a halt. We raised up my wife, who was pale as death and terribly frightened, as were all of us; for there had been ample reason for it, as any one acquainted with the spot would know. Having had already more of their services than was agreeable, Edgar drove the oxen home, and his mother walked back to the house. The other two boys and myself walked on to church. We felt, that morning, indebted to God for a special prayer of thanksgiving for the miraculous way in which we had been kept, some of us at least, in the ordeal through which we had passed.

It may be taken for granted that the old trucks, with a couple of boards, were never again resorted to for going to church on. We have, however, used the hay-rack for weeks together in certain seasons, the same as many others did. The old farm-wagon which we had recently bought, which was more bother than it was worth to keep in repair, was the only vehicle that we possessed, except the trucks, and had to suffice for all purposes. The racks that the settlers first used were usually made out of rough poles, and, consequently, were very heavy and unhandy to lift on and off the wagon. We were a little sensitive when we first went to church perched upon a hay-rack behind a yoke of oxen; but there was nothing unlawful about it that we had heard of, and there

were others who did the same. So by and by that feeling grew somewhat less, and we didn't feel quite so shy about it. When my wife's health was so that she could not go out—and it had to be bad indeed to keep her from religious services—we never thought of such a thing as to hitch up a team, but always walked; summer or winter, sunshine or storm, it was all the same.

As new ministers from time to time came to take charge of our little Church, it seemed a natural thing for them to come directly to our old sod domicile. Being for many years deacon of the Church, and though not having the least inclination to appear officious, I felt the necessity of taking hold of matters and acting a prominent part in all its affairs. This may have been one reason why they so readily found their way, a couple of miles out of town, in cold and storm sometimes, to the old sod house, which for several years boasted of nothing better than the ground for a floor. It would seem there must have been something about it, or in those who occupied it and called it their home, that attracted them and told them that they were more than welcome. And they seemed to enjoy the surroundings, and made themselves perfectly at ease. The old home-made lounge, with comforters and blankets for a bed at night, or to rest on during the day, "Is just as comfortable as it can be," they would say.

There is much that might be said with regard to the events that occurred during the early history of our little Church; many happy events might be narrated. But, pleasing as the picture might be from different points of view, yet the road over which it traveled was by no means free from many a dark cloud hanging over it. There were times when stern, hard work, and a good deal of

what is called the spirit of self-sacrifice was necessary in order to lead it up to the condition it afterwards attained. But for all that, it seems to me now that we were made the stronger for having passed through those adverse experiences ; for, as "there can be no good portrait without shading, no more can there be developed Christian character without sorrow." It is well, I think, that we should take for ourselves the motto written over a Spanish sun-dial, "I mark only the bright hours." "There is more sunshine than shade, more bright than dark hours to be remembered. The temper and disposition of heart, as well as the expressions and capacity of the faculties, depend much upon the trials and disappointments of life. Hence the Christian should not murmur and repine at his lot, but, with confident trust in God's goodness and wisdom, regard every trial, however severe, as a stepping-stone to usefulness here and brighter joys above."

If it had not been that we had a higher Source of power than our own from which to draw strength, we would many times have become dispirited and our courage would have failed and made us almost inclined to give up the contest.

A little strange that it should so happen ; but at the very moment that I am writing the last lines of this chapter, Leonard comes to me with a newpaper, *The Advance*, and reads "Albion.—The first brick of the new house of worship was laid by Mrs. R. J. Dresser, the only resident charter member of the Church ; then Deacon Elisha Culver offered prayer, and at its close, 'I love thy kingdom, Lord,' was sung." The old church was built in 1882, and dedicated and opened for public worship in September of that year.

CHAPTER XX

Practical Religion and a Runaway Fire

DURING the first few years, when there were so few to carry on the religious work, we would try hard, by personal contact, to induce some to go to Sunday-school or to church; but to our entreaties would come back to us that old stereotyped, cut-and-dried reply that they seemed always to carry around with them ready for all emergencies: "I would like very well to go; but I have n't any shoes;" or, "I have n't any clothes fit to go to church in." And this, too, from professing Christians and members of the Church. I have noticed, however, that when these same persons did come into possession of something new, and fit to go to church in, it would, of course, be worn on Sunday for the first time. It might have been kept for that purpose; but the following day, and all other days, would find them doing the same thing, so that it was only a little while before the article would be gone the way of all that had gone before it—"not fit to go to church in." It was noticeable, too, that these same persons, although so easily excusing themselves from attending church or Sunday-school on the Sabbath on account of their clothes, did not allow that to interfere with their visiting their neighbors and acquaintances on that day. I must say that I do like to see a person

with pride enough—if you like to call it by that name—to make a neat and clean appearance on Sunday, so that he may be in a state “fit to go to Church;” or to any other assemblage of respectable people. There are a good many who are continually getting, and yet never have. If not the only reason, it was certainly the greatest of them all, why we, as a family, though passing through as hard times as can well be imagined, were always able to appear respectably attired, that the most extreme care was bestowed on what we had. As soon as we would get home from church, and before doing their chores, the boys would change their clothes, and put them on again in the evening after the work was done, to go to church at night. True, we did receive a little aid from friends in the way of clothing at the time of the grasshopper raids. So also did others receive aid from different sources. And we, too, gave to neighbors some of the things sent to us. The articles were good, and might have served for many years to wear on Sundays and special occasions; but they were taken at once for every-day wear, and in a very little while these also had done all they could to help cover up a person’s nakedness. But notice the difference: The articles which we took from the box for our own use, and no better in quality than any of the rest, we wore on Sundays, and other occasions, for a good many years—I will not tell how many, for fear of being charged with trying to starve out those who made their living by making clothes. My wife was a great one to patch and mend, and that is another reason why we made them last so long—one of the lines of economy that seems to be so little practiced by women in this country, even by those who have the greatest need to practice it. Some, perhaps, might be ashamed

to tell it, but I do not even blush when I say that when my wife was unable to do anything—which was often the case—I would do not a little of that kind of work myself; and the same may be said of the boys. When they wanted a rent sewed up or a patch put on, they did not go begging and whining to their mother every time, but set about it themselves. And they could do better and neater work, all of them, than much that I have seen done by many of the women. And they were equally well drilled in the various duties of household work, cooking, etc.

Their mother's ill-health would often prevent her from going to church, especially at night and in the winter-time; but nothing could daunt her if she could get out at all. At these times I would usually stay at home with her, as it was dull to be left alone, even if it might be safe at all times; or I would take turns with the boys, perhaps. It mattered not how cold, or how deep the snow; and it would have to be a pretty bad storm to keep the boys from tramping two miles to church, to prayer-meeting, choir practice, or whatever it might be. They were acknowledged to be pretty good singers, though that may not be saying very much, and all, in turn, occupied their place in the Church choir, and always took a prominent part in the work of the Church.

There had been very heavy rains during the spring and early summer, which kept the ground in good condition for breaking prairie; and, being anxious to "turn over" all I could this year, I put in every moment of time I could give to work of that kind. The heat of the day was hard on the oxen, and as one of them, "old Jack," had some time been overheated, he was susceptible to the influence of very warm weather; and when so affected he would pant like a dog, and be exceedingly ob-

stinate—mean, as some would say—and altogether uncontrollable. He would stand in the furrow as motionless as the hills on either side of the little valley. You might call to him, "Jack, get up!" and bring that long lash down upon the full length of his body as caressingly as you had a mind to, yet he would n't flinch nor budge an inch out of his place till he "felt like it." And when that feeling did come over him, it was ten chances against one that he would go to the opposite extreme, and start off on a full gallop, and, of course, take his better-natured mate, "Dick," along with him. I used at first to chase after them; but they would lead me all over several acres of prairie, and the faster I ran, the faster they ran; for they seemed to reason—or if it was not reason, it was something that seemed to answer their purpose just as well—that it was not to show any friendly feeling that I was making such a desperate effort to be in close company with them. As the plow would go rolling and tumbling, I saw that there was more danger by chasing them than by letting them take their own way about it, and come to a halt when they "felt like it." On one occasion one of them cut his foot so badly that it disabled him for three or four days, and it was not the one that was the cause of all the mischief, either. So, to have as little as possible of that kind of pastime and amusement, I used to be up and out at work every morning at four o'clock, to avoid, as much as possible, the heat of the day.

For some years past I have been sort of priding myself on the gradual change of temperament that has come over me. It may be, though, for the reason that I have not been guiding a breaking plow behind a stubborn yoke of oxen for a good many years; for I actually believe that, when standing in the furrow for I do n't know how

long at a time, gently stroking old Jack over the back with that long whip, or when chasing after them at a breakneck speed over the prairie, I may have been in the same condition of mind as a person when, with a scowl on his face, he says, "I'm mad." I have a notion that I always did have a kindly disposition, but I'm almost afraid to think how it would be if I again had to break prairie with oxen that were also "mad."

I broke about thirty-five acres on our neighbor's claim, and about twenty-five on our own, besides narrow strips around a meadow lot, and also a fire-guard around the whole quarter section; an acre or more to be prepared for a building spot, if ever we should be fortunate enough to put up a nice little frame house. A large garden was also marked out, and, in subsequent time, trees and hedges were planted in all these places, which we were now preparing for future enjoyment as well as use. Our ambitions were large, and we planned accordingly. All this that we were doing now, and in all the years that followed, cost us an enormous amount of hard labor, and my wife would often complain that I was working too hard. "Just killing yourself," she would say; "and very likely somebody else will enjoy it, and not you." But what kind of a home would it be for me without these surroundings of nature! I could hardly endure to live as many did, and still do, on the open prairie, with scarcely a sign of the smallest shrub, even, anywhere about. It was not because she found no pleasure in such things that she thus complained—I hardly like to use this last word in her case—for she found equal enjoyment in them with myself, and delighted in them; nor was it that she feared that somebody else would enjoy the fruit of my labor. O no! Although she often used

those words, it was not that; for that was so extremely contrary to her nature. But it was myself that she was thinking and worrying so much about. She simply felt that I was doing too much, and that it would tell on me physically.

I never felt so completely worn out as I did these nine or ten weeks whilst doing this breaking. Being so extremely anxious to do all I could, I would continue to work with the oxen till about ten o'clock, and then come in and get my breakfast. I never accustomed myself to take a little rest after dinner—"take a little nap," as they would say—as I knew some of my neighbors to do. I could not sleep in the day anyway, and scarcely got any real sound sleep at night. As time went on, I became so weary that I reeled and staggered as I walked up the road to my work in the early morning. Although I could not sleep, yet my eyelids seemed to resist my efforts to keep them apart as I walked along. For whilst the oxen were resting in the day, I was always busy about some other work. For as it has been stated before, my wife was so often unable to do anything, I used to do a good deal in the house, as did also the boys. This experience in housework was not despised and looked upon as degrading, nor ought it to be regarded by any boy, no matter what his social standing may be, though that seems too often the case. About two o'clock in the afternoon, I would take the oxen out again, and work till nearly dark.

One day this fall, we did a thing that was ever after remembered, and the experience was a lesson for us; and it cost us something, too. As it was getting late in the season, and the grass was all dried up, we were anxious to be doing something to make ourselves secure as far

as we might be able against the destructive prairie fires. So early one morning, when all seemed calm, I thought we might venture to burn off a strip of prairie about two rods wide; so I had the two boys, each with a wet sack, stand close by, whilst I struck a match and touched it to the grass. It flashed up in a moment, and, not liking the way it acted, we all plied our wet sacks and dashed out the fire. I was a little afraid after that, but with the utmost caution. I applied another lighted match. For a moment it seemed as though we might venture to let it go, but in another moment all our frantic efforts to beat it out availed no more than would an attempt to beat back the waves of the mighty ocean with the same weapons. It seemed impossible for such a wind to be almost instantly created by starting a little fire like that. But a gust came, and the head-fire darted swiftly away from us. There was not a shadow of hope of checking that head-fire now. So on it went, the wind carrying it northward up the valley, sweeping everything before it in its mad haste. There were two or three settlers a mile and a half to the north, and already the tongues of fire seemed to leap forward and vie with each other as to which should be the first to lick up the little stuff they might have about them. It may be just possible, however, we thought, they can help themselves a little; and all that we could do was to keep it out of the little timber in the ravine, and from getting up to the house. We fought desperately, till it seemed that we would drop from exhaustion, being so afraid of the damage and loss that others might sustain. O what fighting! No one can ever realize what this means unless he has fought the same battle. Having steered the fire so as to keep it away from the house, we ran on up the valley as fast as

we could. But it was not at a very great speed; for with the hard fighting our strength had almost failed. But on we went, and as we drew near to the little settlement we could see dense clouds of smoke ascending in two or three spots near by the two houses. This told us that stacks, sheds, or something of that kind had fallen a prey to the angry flames. The fire had gone as near to the houses as possible, but being made of sod there was not so much danger to them. We could see the fire still rushing on up over the hills a mile away to the north. But fortunately there were no more settlers in that direction for many miles, away into the next county. The fire had burnt up a shed built of poles, old hay, etc. A small stack of wheat was also burned, containing about twenty bushels, and was the first that the man had raised, and all that he had. A little stack of hay shared the same fate. I tried to explain to the man how it all came about, and expressed my deep regret at the very unfortunate occurrence; but he replied only with oaths and curses. I feel sure, however, from the look on the faces of the two women who stood by, that I had their sympathy; they seemed to realize more than did the man something of my own feelings just at that time. I told the man that I would make every reparation that came within my power for any loss that he had sustained, and he soon tempered down so as to talk a little reasonably, if not very pleasantly. But there was no time for more words than was absolutely needed to come to a satisfactory understanding in the matter.

The head-fire had cut a swath as it flew onward, and had taken all that came in its path. But it was still burning, and spreading on either side up and down the valley, and was getting up onto the hills. Although al-

most completely exhausted, there was a lot more of hard work to do yet; for if the fire should be left to its own course, there was no telling what the damage and loss might be. The wind might change suddenly, and head-fires would at once be started and driven in other directions, and nothing could stay their progress. It might even leap the creek—which it did several times subsequent to that—and spread destruction all up and down Beaver Valley, where was most of the settlement. So we ran on again down the valley to a point where we thought our efforts would tell for the most, and worked our way up over the hills which lie on the east; then northward with the wind, beating out the fire as we went. As the day advanced, the wind gently died away, and then burned more slowly. We followed along and beat out the fire for nearly a mile and a half, feeling now that we could stand it no longer and must give up. For we had taken no breakfast, starting out quite early in the morning. So we made our way back home; for we could endure it no longer without some refreshment and a few minutes' rest. There we found my wife alone with the youngest boy, pale and excited, and wondering what had happened all this long time that we had been away. By going up onto the mound over the cave she could see that the fire was doing its deadly work amongst the little settlement away up the valley, and this terrified her still more; for she knew too well how much every one of us needed the little that we had about us. But to her, life was more dear than all else. "These other things," she would say, "we may have an opportunity to rectify; but when life is gone, that can not be brought back." We were home again under the old sod roof, and apparently unharmed, save that which fatigue and ex-

haustion had wrought. Knowing her so well, it needed no inquiry when she took the child by the hand and led him away behind the curtain stretched across the room, to know what it all meant. It would seem cruel, almost sacrilege, to intrude on her presence at such a time; for it was sacred ground on which she then stood. As she emerged from behind the curtain, the imprint left on the delicate forehead by resting it against the stubby roots in the black, dirt wall told its own tale, that to some One her most heartfelt thanks were due, and knowing well who it was, without a moment's delay had hastened to discharge that happy duty. And so we had no need to inquire its meaning; we had been kept, and that was enough.

After taking a little to eat and resting a few minutes, we again went out. For we feared to leave anything undone that we could possibly do. This time we went over onto the hills on the other side of the valley, and fought our way northward for a mile or more. But as we had been fighting so hard the whole day long, and as night was now near, failing strength told us that we must cease to fight any more. So with scorched and begrimed faces and hands we turned away, and with heavy tread over the blackened prairie, made our way homeward.

According as I had promised, I lost no time in rendering our neighbor all the assistance that I could, and went with him to the timber to get poles and other stuff for building a good stable. We then plowed some sod, and whilst the man hauled it in with his team, I laid up the walls and did all the building. I also gave him some meat and some flour. Then we went into the field

—we had a little corn on a five-acre patch that year—and picked ten or twelve bushels of corn; and when we had our little wheat threshed, I gave him seed for another year. So altogether—by his manner, at least—he seemed to think that he was the gainer, rather than the loser, after all; and I suppose he was, considerably.

CHAPTER XXI

Grasshopper Plague and Aid to Sufferers

REV. MR. LOWES had discontinued his services with our Church, and Rev. C. C. Humphrey, with his family, came to us about this time—the spring of 1874—from Osceola, Polk County. They lived for a short time in what we called the Newberry house, south of town, and then moved across the creek into the sod house where we had been holding our Church services and Sunday-school. In a little while they moved again into another sod house down near the old cañon. They were not there long, however, before they were again routed. And this is the way many of the “home missionaries” out on the Western prairies, where no parsonage was provided, were driven from one place to another. Finally, they moved across the creek again into a house owned by the young man with whom I had roosted away up on a perch of grain sacks a little time before. To make more room for the minister, we “got up a bee” to build an addition to the house. At these “bees” the neighbors all around would come together with their teams and implements to the appointed place, and each one would put in a day or more at whatever the work might be. Sometimes it was husking corn, sometimes plowing, hauling wood, or building—anything that was imperative to be done. This usually occurred when the person aided had been sick, maybe, and thus thrown behind in his

work; or, he may have lost one of his horses, and so was deprived of a team to work with. Or he may have met with misfortune in some other way; for there are a thousand ways by which these things may come.

This custom of "getting up a bee" shows something of the spirit of helpfulness that existed amongst the settlers in a new country, and afforded relief to those who might otherwise have suffered more severely under sickness and misfortune.

Having been ordained deacon under the hand of our new pastor in the early part of his ministry with us, I served in that capacity all the time he remained with us, and continued to do so for many years afterwards. This is the year that will always be remembered more particularly, and known all over as the "grasshopper times in Nebraska" and surrounding States. Grasshoppers had visited us more or less all along up to this time, destroying most of the little crop of corn that we had been trying to raise. But this year they came down upon us in mighty armies. It is too difficult a task for me even to attempt to describe it in a way that a person could realize anything like what it was. One must have the same experience to know much about it. The little wheat crop was damaged considerably; but it was a pretty fair crop after all, so we thought, at least, compared with some years; for when we threshed it we found that we had a hundred and twenty bushels from ten acres of ground. Some advised smoking out the grasshoppers by placing green weeds, or any old rubbish, along the edge of the field, and setting fire to it. Glad to try almost any method that might be suggested, we gave this plan a trial; but it seemed all a waste of time. The only effect that it had was to scare a few

of them off a few rods along the edge of the field, only to alight a little further on. And more than that, we came near seeing the whole field go up in a blaze.

The grasshoppers did not appear in full force till after most of the small grain was cut. But everything else—corn, beans, and vegetables of all kinds, all except about fifteen bushels of potatoes, of which we had planted quite a large piece of ground, were destroyed. This indeed was a trying time for the settlers; for they had been able to raise almost nothing up to this time, and now that there was a little prospect, to have almost everything destroyed in a few hours was very discouraging. This of itself was hard enough to bear; but the burden pressed down still heavier when we read in the Eastern papers—as we did sometimes—remarks made in a mirth-provoking way about the “poor grasshopper sufferers of Nebraska.” They seemed to insinuate that the whole affair was a good deal exaggerated, and that the settlers were making a great ado about a small matter. As I have hinted before, it seems hardly possible to overdraw the picture. And putting it as mildly as I may, some might almost discredit my words when I say that they drifted over in such dense clouds as to blacken the whole heavens, and with such a buzzing, roaring noise that it could be heard quite a long time before they came up over us. Sometimes they would fly very low, and at other times they would be far above us, drifting along by the myriads, their gauzy wings glistening like tiny bits of silver. And as they would gently fall to the earth, like a skylark with outstretched wings falling out of the heavens, the sight was much like that of large snow-flakes in a gentle storm. When they settled down, the corn and other vegetation would be so completely cov-

ered as to be black with them, one over another. But the corn was their first choice to feed upon. When they had stripped it of every particle of foliage—which they would do in a night—they would stick so thickly on the stumps of stalks, and crawling over one another, that no room would be left to stick the point of your finger. I have seen them in the potato-patch and everywhere about, so thick that hardly a speck of ground could be seen. They would swarm in the roads, and be crushed under the wheels of the wagon, and be so thick everywhere that we would be obliged to tie our pants round with a string at the bottom to keep them from trespassing on forbidden ground. For the sensation was just about as pleasant as the crawling of a snake would be, with a gentle waking up with their finely-adjusted forceps in the bargain. As we walked along, they would rise up from the ground in such clouds and swarm about us that we had to fight our way through them. It was a time, too, when nobody needed to be admonished to "keep his mouth shut."

Severe as was the calamity, there was yet more to follow in the years to come. It is well, I think, that we are kept in the dark as to what the future has in store for us, else how deep the despair, and how much more unhappy this life would be for many, by the anticipation of sorrow and suffering yet in the future.

Calls for aid went out all over the country, to which the people responded. This aid consisted chiefly of clothing and provisions, which passed through the hands of relief committees, or associations appointed to have charge of the distribution. But whilst the business was conducted systematically, the relief was not justly administered in all cases, by any means. As might be expected,

there was great demand for seed of different kinds—wheat, oats, etc. But there was little, if any, that I am aware of, that reached our county; and none, I am sure, came into the precinct to which I belonged. As to their names, I will keep silent; but there were two who had charge of the distribution in our county, and they appointed a deputy in each school district, appointing me for our precinct. Although there were so few settlers in the district, I spent considerable time over the work. For before any distribution was made—in fact, before any relief of any kind came in—a good deal of information had first to be gathered and sent to headquarters. It was no easy matter to make proper discrimination; consequently some who could have managed to get along without aid shared with those who could not. Then again, there were others in the greatest need who did not get what they rightly ought to have claimed, and in some cases received nothing at all. Some, as would naturally be expected, received aid from relatives and friends.

Printed forms were furnished, and numerous questions asked; such as the following: Amount of crop raised that year of the different kinds of grain, etc.—corn, wheat, oats, barley, potatoes, beans, and onions. A census also had to be taken, giving the names of parents, or heads of families, with the names and ages of the children, and whether male or female. The number and kind of stock the settler owned was also given, in the order named: Horses, colts, oxen, cows, yearlings, calves, and pigs. Then again, they wanted to know how much of the different kinds of grain, etc., each one had on hand at a given date; such as flour, wheat, oats, barley, potatoes, beans, and onions. This was the winter of 1874-75.

Of course, we received no remuneration for our services, nor had any thought of receiving any; at least, I can speak that for myself, although I tramped over the prairie in the deep snow afoot a good deal. The clothing and other stuff that came through these agencies were in great part brought in over the railroads free of charge. And in many instances, when private parties shipped goods to their relatives and friends, reduced rates were granted. And yet the effort on the part of those eager to show their sympathy and good will by their gifts did not altogether escape criticism by those whom they seemed so anxious to help. I must not be understood as complaining when I say that it was not altogether without reason that they did so. I would not pretend to speak for more than I know, but I am fully aware of the fact that the greater part of the little clothing that came into our own district—and the same complaint was made in other districts—was so unfit for service that, had it been necessary to pay freight on the goods, they would hardly have paid for the handling. Many of the things were torn and ragged, and might perhaps have answered the purpose for making rag-carpet, or rugs, or something of that kind, and that's about all. I attribute this in large measure to thoughtlessness. In their great haste to do somebody good, they had overlooked other important matters. It had not entered their minds how hard it was sometimes to "scrape up ten cents"—the price then—to purchase a spool of thread to sew up the rents in these tattered garments. I make no charges, but I hardly like to think that no better things than those some of us saw were contributed by the donors. I want to be very careful in my statements, and therefore whether true or not, I would not pretend to say;

but if it was, that perhaps would explain somewhat why so many of the articles were in such bad condition. The rumor was common that the things had been "pretty well culled" before those for whom they were intended caught sight of them. I do know this, however, that after all the stuff was supposed to have been exhausted and the distribution over, one of the two who had charge asked me if I had had any lard. I replied that I had not. He then said, "Come up, and I will let you have a little." So I went up to his house, south of town, and got three or four pounds of lard in a small tin pail. Whilst there, I saw the man dip the lard from a large barrel, about the size of an oil-barrel, which was about two-thirds full.

We had been corresponding all along with good friends in St. Louis, and from that and through the newspapers, they were aware somewhat of our condition, and became a good deal concerned about our welfare, and evinced a strong desire to assist us in whatever way they might be able. They were so situated themselves as to be able to render but little material aid, but were overflowing with genuine sympathy for us. So with the assistance of some friends, they "made up a box" of clothing and shipped it to Columbus, the freight having been prepaid. In a letter telling of its shipment, we read, "You will find some small clothes for children, which you can trade off for something else, I hope." We made no trades, however, as suggested by our friends; for we were not in the habit of making trades that way. But my wife gave these things to neighbors—as we did some of the other things also, which we could have made good use of ourselves. Her sympathetic feeling for others in distress and want was so intense that she lost sight of self and her own actual needs. Her motto was—which

she would often repeat, especially if she might be mildly chided by one whose heart perhaps was not as tender and sympathetic as her own, for suggesting to give this or that little thing to some person whom she thought to be in need—"With what measure ye mete to others, it shall be meted to you again." Not that she gave with the expectation of receiving something in return, in a material way, from humankind; far indeed from that. She looked for it to come back in some unknown way; and yet she believed it would come back, all the same. In fact, it was coming all the time; if not in material gifts, in kind words and true sympathy, often more precious than gold or silver. "Such as I have, give I thee." So the thought, "If it's only a crumb that I am able to give, I am responsible for that crumb." I can liken her only to the fountain in the little story or fable called "The selfish pool, and what befell it." Let me here give it, for it is worth repeating for the lesson there is in it:

"See that little fountain away yonder in the distant mountain, shining like a silver thread through the thick copse, and sparkling like a diamond in its healthful activity. It is hurrying on with tinkling feet to bear its tribute to the river. See, it passes a stagnant pool, and the pool hails it, 'Whither away, master streamlet?' 'I am going to the river, to bear this cup of water God has given me.' 'Ah! you are very foolish for that; you'll need it before the summer is over. It has been a backward spring, and we shall have a hot summer to pay for it; you will dry up then.' 'Well,' says the streamlet, 'if I am to die so soon, I had better work while the day lasts. If I am likely to lose this treasure from the heat, I had better do good with it while I have it.' So on it went, blessing and rejoicing in its course. The pool

smiled complacently at its own superior forethought, and husbanded all its resources, letting not a drop steal away. Soon the midsummer heat came down, and it fell upon the little stream; but the trees crowded to its brink, and threw out their sheltering branches over it in the day of adversity, for it brought refreshment and life to them; and the sun peeped through their branches, and smiled complacently upon its dimpled face, and seemed to say, 'It is not in my heart to harm you;' and the birds sipped its silver tide and sang its praises; and the flowers breathed their perfume upon its bosom; the beasts of the field loved to linger by its banks; the husbandman's eye always sparkled with joy as he looked upon the line of verdant beauty that marked its course through his fields and meadows; and so on it went, blessing and being blessed of all. And where was the prudent pool? Alas! in its inglorious inactivity it grew sickly and pestilential. The beasts of the field put their lips to it, but turned away without drinking; the breezes stooped and kissed it by mistake, but caught the malaria in the contact, and carried the ague through the region, and the inhabitants caught it and had to move away; and at last Heaven, in mercy to man, smote it with a hotter breath and dried it up. But did not the little fountain exhaust itself? O no! God saw to that. It emptied its full cup into the river, and the river bore it to the sea, and the sea sent up its incense to greet the sun, and the clouds caught in their capacious bosoms the incense from the sea, and the winds, like waiting steeds, caught the chariots of the clouds and bore them away, away to the very mountain that gave the little fountain birth, and there they tipped the brimming cup, and poured the grateful baptism down; and so God saw to it that the little fountain, though it gave so fully and so freely, never ran dry."

Our friends had apprised us by letter of the shipment of the box, and we calculated that there would be just sufficient time to drive down to Columbus and get it and be back again by Christmas. The boys being especially anxious to see its contents, were up some time before daylight, and had the oxen hitched to the wagon all ready to start. So I set out, and after traveling a few miles, I discovered that it was intensely cold riding, so I got down from the wagon and walked. My feet were so numbed that they had no feeling in them. However, I hobbled along as well as I could till the blood began to warm up a little. And so I kept on till I came up to the unfinished walls of a sod house. Here I staid a little while, and let the oxen eat a little hay that I scraped up around the walls; for the settlers often stopped here to feed their teams when on the road. I staid only a short time, however, for it was too cold to be standing around, and so went on several miles beyond the Indian Agency. Quite late in the night, I came up to a house which stood a little off from the road, where lived a man named Lehman, and here I turned in. The next morning, I drove into Columbus, arriving there a little before noon. I went at once across to the depot, and inquired after the box. Imagine, if you can, my disappointment when told by the agent, "I have nothing here in your name." I told him that the old oxen and I had come fifty miles through the cold solely to get that box, and what a disappointment it would be for the folks at home. But, of course, all this was nothing to him; and the only reply was, "The box is not here, and that's all I know about it." And he seemed to care, too, just about as little as he knew about it. But for all that, I very politely thanked him, and that seemed to be the weapon that subdued his harshness a little;

for it so worked upon his sympathetic nature as to promise that he would drop me a postal card as soon as the box arrived. Just a little disheartened, perhaps, I felt no inclination to loiter in town; so after the oxen had rested a couple of hours, I again started out, anxious to get back home as quickly as possible. The oxen had been standing, and had got cold, and knowing, too, that they were bound for home, "put their best leg first," and walked along briskly. By traveling late, I reached the Agency that night. Feeling that it was no place for me to be going to the boarding-house, and having a little food that I brought from home, I took my blankets and went up into the loft, and buried myself in the hay. But I was glad when the first glimmer of light began to show between the boards and I could be up; for I was so cold all night that I couldn't sleep any. By the time the first glimpse of the sun showed itself up over the hills, I was two or three miles nearer home. When I came up to the creek, I took the oxen down the bank by the side of the "reservation bridge," and broke a hole in the ice and let the oxen drink. But they seemed to care little for it, and opened their mouths and twisted their jaws a good deal, as though it was a little too cold for their teeth.

It was nearly dark when I reached home. The boys had been anxiously watching for my return, and as they heard me coming up out of the ravine a little way from the house, all three came running to meet me, full of expectation, of course, to see the box. But just imagine the way they opened their eyes, and their look of astonishment and utter disappointment when they saw nothing but the empty wagon! "Why, where's the box?" one would say, with eyes more or less as big as saucers. "O father! have n't you got the box?" another would

say; and a third, climbing up and peering into the wagon, "Well, I'd like to know what we're going to do about it?" And so they continued all the way up the road. As I neared the house, their mother was looking out at the window, and that complacent smile, which always greeted us on our return home from a journey, changed to an expression of surprise when the wagon passed by and she saw that it was empty. But not like the boys, who could not be satisfied with an answer, it needed a reply to only a few questions to satisfy her that there need be no fear, but that the box would find its way to us all right some time. Of course, she greatly regretted my having had such a long and unpleasant journey for nothing. But after all, we thought, as we had done before, "worse things have happened at sea."

A few days later a letter came from St. Louis, saying how much they regretted that I had been compelled to make such a long and useless journey, and that they went at once to the railroad agent and had him send a "tracer" after the box; for I had mailed a postal card to them before I left Columbus. So in a few days more I repeated the journey that I had made a week before, but this time succeeded in bringing home the box about which there had been so much concern.

Coming back to the returns about which I have spoken: In order to concentrate the information and facilitate matters, I took a small blank-book and ruled it off in columns and headings, and made them out in tabulated form. And to give a clearer understanding of it, I give here a copy, which is almost a *fac-simile* of the original. So it may be seen exactly the kind of report that was sent in from the school district that I belonged to. The way others made their returns, I know nothing about.

FAMILY REGISTER.					AMOUNT OF GRAIN, ETC., RAISED.—NUMBER OF BUSHELS.						
Name, or Heads of Families.	Names of Children.	Sex.	Age.		Corn, Bushels.	Wheat, Bushels.	Oats, Bushels.	Buckwheat, Bushels.	Potatoes, Bushels.	Beans, Bushels.	Onions, Rustich,
John and Emma Turner.	Edgar Mansfield, Ernest Sylvester, Leonard Anthony.	Male, " "	14 years, " "	None.	120	None.	None.	None.	16	None.	None.
A. G. and R. Francisco.	Adda, Arabel, Frank, Agnes, Ransom, . . .	Female, " "	15 " "	None.	10 acres not threshed	None.	None.	None.	10	None.	None.
H. T. and S. L. Johnson.	William, Flora, Lillie Bell, . . .	Male, " "	16 " "	None.	None.	None.	None.	None.	None.	None.	None.
Martin and M. Allen.	Nathan, . . .	Male, " "	15 " "	None.	10 acres not threshed.	None.	None.	None.	20	None.	None.
David and M. Whitten.	Mary, Alice, Rosy, Carrie, . . .	Female, " "	10 " "	None.	None.	None.	None.	None.	None.	None.	None.
T. J. and — Jennings.	Jennie, . . .	Female,	John, Hannah, George, (Baby), . . .	Male, " "	None.	76	None.	None.	20	None.	None.
Moses Whitten. (single man.)								(Clerking in store, and not in need.)			
G. H. and A. Kingham.	No family.				None.	27	None.	None.	None.	None.	None.
					None.	38	None.	None.	None.	None.	None.
								(Not in need—away working at trade.)			

AMOUNT OF GRAIN, ETC., ON HAND 1874.

Report.—School District No. 7.	Losses SUSTAINED, AND IN WHAT MANNER.					DESCRIPTION OF THINGS MOST NEEDED.		
	Corn.	Wheat.	Oats.	Potatoes.	Beans.	Other Vegetables.	Total Loss	
David Whitten,	300 bushels, \$130.	40 bushels, \$40.	.....	.....	.....	.....	\$146.00	Corn, Oats, Barley, etc., for Spring seeding.
T. J. Jennings, . . . . .	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
H. T. Johnson,	495 bushels, \$195.	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	Barley, Oats, and Wheat, for Spring seeding.
M. Allen,	90 bushels, \$36.	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	56.00	Clothing—prevent.
J. Turner,	245 bushels, \$98.	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	205.00	Corn, Oats, and Barley, for Spring seeding.
A. G. Francisco,	385 bushels, \$154.	20 bushels, \$12.	75 bushels, \$30.	(Vegetables, \$35.)	.....	.....	231.00	Mostly Bed-clothing — prevent; Barley, Oats, and Potatoes, for Spring seeding.
G. H. Kingham,	225 bushels, \$90.	20 bushels, \$12.	.....	.....	.....	.....	118.00	.....
Moses Whitten,	210 bushels, \$84.	33 bushels, \$19.80.	.....	.....	.....	.....	118.80	Barley, Oats, Wheat, etc., for Spring seeding.

CHAPTER XXII

A Time for Everything, and Everything in its Time

AFTER we had finished cutting our grain, I worked around amongst the neighbors, helping them in the field. But I never received a cent in money for work done in this way. If any little balance might be due to me after a squaring up of accounts, it came in a variety of ways. In an old memorandum-book, I find such entries as these: "By harvest work, by hayfork, by turkeys, by lumber, by pork, by order on grocery store, by pair ox-bows, by wheat, by barley and oats for seed," etc.

As soon as we got through with this kind of work, I and the man who cut our wheat worked together stacking our grain. We worked first on our own place, and I did the stacking. I wanted to get all the grain in one stack, but laid the foundation too small, so I had to carry it higher than I intended. Up and up it went, still higher and higher, and more stuff yet to come; so that at last the man had to make two or three attempts before he could make the bundles reach me as I bent over to catch them as they came up. It was a round stack, and the prettiest and most symmetrically formed that I have ever seen—in this country, at least; and so said everybody who saw it. Every time I passed by it I was reminded of the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, in London, so nearly did it resemble it in shape at the top. Although never having done anything of the kind before, with the

exception of that peculiar-looking stack the year before, my stacking always received a good deal of commendation. In the performance of the different kinds of labor, and in the use of implements and machinery, I was loath to manifest my ignorance by asking questions as to the way this or that thing should be done. But I kept a watchful eye on the way others were doing things, and it was not long before I could not only do as they did, but could often see a way of improving on their methods. My partner being an old hand at the business, of course, commenced to do his own stacking. I strongly urged him to do mine, but he insisted that I should do it myself. "I guess you 'll get along all right," he said. But I 'm a little suspicious that he was expecting to have something to laugh over as soon as I began my work of rick-building. But instead of that, he made such an utter failure with his own stacking that he insisted that I should take his place. And I regret to say that, as the whole side of the stack went out, and he with it, he so far forgot the company he was in as to administer some very plain oaths and curses upon that offending stack. He seemed to have the idea that all the responsibility for the mishap rested upon the stack—which at one time it did. My friend for the time being was an Irishman, and still retained a good deal of the Irish brogue, which was quite comical and amusing. I was in no way eager to take the job, as the stack was so far extended that it looked like a young one growing out of the side of the larger; and to prevent it from taking on the appearance of the "Siamese twins" was going to be no easy matter. I never was called a braggadocio, but I did have confidence enough in myself—although a raw hand at the business—to believe that if the stack could in any

way be "fixed up" I could do it. But the stack had long lost all shape, and it was useless now attempting to make another "St. Paul's dome." Afterwards, as people passed along and looked down across the field, twisting their neck and looking back as they passed beyond, they seemed to be saying to themselves, "I wonder who can be the designer of that stack; and what on earth is it really intended to represent?"

The stacking being all done, we began at once making hay; for we needed more this year, as we had now not only the oxen and cow and two or three calves, but also the two heifers that we had fetched up from Colfax County, making altogether eight head.

There seemed not a moment's time to rest; for besides the regular work which had to be kept up, there were long journeys to go to get wood, to the mill, etc. As soon as frost came—which would usually be about September—and the grass and weeds began to dry, this was a reminder that we had better be looking out for prairie-fires. The wise thing then to do was to get about plowing fire-guards.

During the summer months the heat was so oppressive that when we had a fire we could hardly bear to stay in the house. For having only one room, it had to serve every purpose—living, cooking, and sleeping. So we built a small addition in which to put the stove in the summer time, and be rid of the heat from that at any rate. It did not last long, however; for in building there was no way of binding the walls to the house, and it gradually settled, so that the walls and the roof all along shrank away from the main building, and when it rained the water ran down the wall onto the floor.

After moving out of the old house, we used part of

it as a place to keep the cattle for nearly two years. One of the small rooms we used for various purposes, just as we might need. This year we used it to stow the wheat in, emptying it upon the ground.

There was so much that was imperative to be done before the storms and cold of winter set in; nevertheless, a good deal had to be left for future time. And so we discovered that the return of winter had dropped down upon us with but a scant supply of fuel.

Our most estimable lady friend in St. Louis, knowing nothing of the way the pioneer settlers of the Nebraska plains divided up the several departments of labor through the year, in one of her letters asked the question: "Why is it that the long journeys are almost always made during the cold and stormy weather of winter? Why can't they be made at some less unfavorable season, and serve the purpose just as well, or better?" To a person altogether unacquainted with the conditions as they existed with the settlers generally, such questions would be the first to be asked. The reason was this, that everything must be done in the order in which the seasons naturally present themselves. Each had more than enough work to fill its allotted time, one thing crowding upon another. The conditions, too, in an older settled country are altogether different from those on the frontier, where no transportation facilities in the way of railroads are afforded, and where everything has to be made, as it were, from the beginning. And besides, the people were almost universally poor—little or nothing to start with. And there are a hundred and one things that seem absolutely necessary to be done that may not be thought of until the time approaches when they are needed. Corn was usually put in with hand-planters,

but sometimes a spade or a hoe, or even an ax was often used. Horse-planters, check-rowers, pulverizers, corn-stalk cutters, and all that kind of things were not known amongst the settlers at that time.

We always spent a good deal of time in our purpose to have a good garden if possible, trying to make up by extra labor and nursing what might be lacking in natural advantages. Then again, we were planting lots of trees about the place every spring, as soon as the ground was in fit condition. What with all these things coming along in their natural order, and a host of others that came along indiscriminately, but just as urgent in their demands, we felt the cold blasts and snows of winter whirling about our ears before we realized how great a portion of the year had really slipped away—and was here to stay by us for about five months. This did not accord exactly with the almanacs sent out from the East, that told us the day and the hour when winter would begin and when it would end. But from actual experience we had become so accustomed to associating the different terms, "winter," and "cold," and "storm," that practically they were one and the same thing to us. And so we were always in doubt and uncertainty as to when winter would come and when it would go.

CHAPTER XXIII

Famished of Thirst

It was invariably the case that as soon as the grain was threshed, the first thing would be to hurry off to the mill. We had been borrowing a little flour from one and a little from another of the neighbors—which was a customary thing to do. It was frequently the case that as soon as we would get home from the mill, neighbors would come to borrow flour; and in a few days perhaps the whole grist would almost disappear. But, of course, it would come back to us again—a little from one and a little from another, after they, too, had been to the mill.

When we first went into the new country there was no mill nearer than the Shell Creek mills, sixty miles away, except the mill on the Indian Reservation, which was not running at that time. But some time before this a mill was built on what was called the "Little Cedar Creek," in the Elkhorn Valley, in Antelope County, more than thirty miles away, and we had been over there once or twice. But this time we were to have a new experience, for we were going with a horse-team. Our minister having a pair of horses, he suggested that we take them. "For," said he, "it will be better every way." We, too, thought it would be considerable of an improvement over the oxen; but after we had gone some distance we began to wonder if we had not made a mistake.

after all by not taking old Jack and Dick. For they were all stiffened up, and little good for anything. We took a different road, too, this time; for we had been told that it was a shorter route. But when we came within four or five miles of Oakdale—where the mill was—we found it pretty hilly. We had only four or five sacks of wheat on the wagon, and got along pretty well till we came to the creek, where we had to cross on a very narrow bridge, and which was in bad condition. The creek was quite deep from the top of the banks down to the water, and the bridge having no railing along the sides made it very dangerous to pass over. And although the banks had been cut down considerably, the descent was very abrupt. We managed to get down, however, without any mishap, but in trying to get out on the other side we failed. We expected to have some trouble in climbing the bank, and had found a block of wood in the timber on the bank to put under the wheel in case the horses should balk or fail in some way and back down the hill again. For that was our greatest fear; for if they should, it would be more than likely that the whole affair, horses and all, would go over the bridge into the creek below. Fortunately, we took this precaution; for when the horses got about half way up the hill, they seemed to think they could n't make the other half, and began to slide down hill. Edgar was driving, and shouted, "Get up!" and applied the whip; but it had no effect. But before the wagon had moved a couple of feet, I had the block under the wheel, and held it. Not feeling inclined to risk smashing up the whole business, we carried the sacks up onto the bank. It was only a little while then when we had the wagon up also and were on the road again. It was after dark

when we drove into the little place—just two or three little buildings besides the mill. After unloading, we put the horses into the barn, and then went into the mill and sat there in the cold and ate our supper; then we went to the little place they called a “hotel” and engaged a bed—a comfort rarely enjoyed when away from home on a journey. There was snow everywhere, and the night was very cold, although so near springtime; and we knew of no haystack that we could crawl into.

When I went to the stable the next morning, the man there looking after things, pointing to the horses, said, “Is that your team?” I said to him, “Yes, sir.” He then said, “When I came in this morning, that white horse was down, and the other one was tramping on his neck.” Something must have happened, for he was stiffened up so badly that when we took him out of the stable he was hardly able to move. But after we had been on the road a little while he got somewhat better of it, but it made slow traveling. In returning home, we kept the bridge well in mind, and were particular not to risk that any more, but took the old road. It was late in the night when we reached home, and the two boys had long been in bed; but their mother was still up awaiting our coming.

It would have been hard to persuade her to go to bed when any of us were away and expecting to be home that night. She seemed to be in constant fear lest something should happen to us. And if the boys had gone downtown, to a meeting of some kind, perhaps—for they never went unless they had good reason for going—when a reasonable time came for them to be home she would become very anxious and uneasy, and go frequently to the door and look and listen for their com-

ing. Sometimes something may have delayed them—a storm may have come up since they started out; or one that was in progress when they went away had increased in violence. At such times her anxiety would become so intense that it seemed she could scarcely contain herself. And as she would return again and again from her frequent visits to the door, she would exclaim in a low, plaintive voice, indicative of distress, and so easily detected: "O, I wish the boys would come!" or, "I wish the boys had not gone out; I'm beginning to feel worried about them!" Then she would kneel again by the old lounge on which Edgar slept, and in silence commune again with Him who alone was her Source of help and strength, and plead that his protecting arms be cast about her boys. And at last, after listening at the open door and peering out into the darkness, or into the drifting snow, her quick ear, which had been so well trained to this particular duty of watching and waiting, had caught the sound of voices in the distance, with a light step—for though frail of health she was quick in her movements—she would turn from the door with a glad, satisfied smile on her face, exclaiming, "O they're coming; I'm so glad! Thank God!" and at once kneel again by the old lounge. Although perhaps not in sight, yet so long as she was within hearing we knew very well that the smile was there by the peculiar tone of her voice; for that tone and that voice were inseparable. It would be the same way when leaving home to go a journey. She would take the children by the hand, and kneel by the side of the bed, or by a chair—anywhere—and say to them, "Let us ask God to take care of 'Dada'"—a term used in England a good deal for "Papa"—"and Edgar, and bring them back again safely."

One of the greatest and most constant difficulties with which we had to contend, as I may have stated before, was to keep ourselves supplied with fuel, as we were compelled to go so far off, and hardly knew where to go to get it. In the summer we needed it only for cooking, and used to scrape up anything almost that would burn—cornstalks, sunflowers, and anything in the way of brushwood that we could find on the place. A good many young trees had started up in the ravine since we had been on the land and had kept out the fires, and I was doing all I could to encourage that very thing; so, of course, I would not think of cutting them down to burn. But in the winter it was different; we had to have something to burn that would give warmth. All the timber had been taken from the "Oaks," but there were yet a few trimmings scattered about. So we used to put the hayrack on the wagon and go with that. We would have to hunt around all day—usually three of us—to get a load of any size. And after preparing it, it kept one almost constantly stuffing it into the stove, as it burned away so quickly. But these things were not to be counted; for we must have fuel, though of an inferior kind, or freeze; and we could never give up to that without a desperate struggle.

In the summer time, too, when it seemed possible to steal a day, we would go with the wagon-box. The prairie-fires had been running through the timber year after year, burning the young trees and shoots that had started up in the spring; but the little, knotty stumps of roots kept on growing and spreading on the surface. Some of them were no larger and no thicker than a person's hand. These we used to hunt for and chop them out. And if we found an old stump of a tree still left,

we would hack away and get chips off that. It was hard to find one of these, however; for as soon as all the timber had been cleared off, the settlers went to work grubbing out all the stumps. But there were two or three to be found after they had got through, which it seemed they had not the courage to tackle. But we were not to be daunted by little things, so we chipped and chipped away at these. We used also to take sacks along and hunt for chips, picking a stray one here and there, till at last it got so that it was not easy to spy out one as big as your hand.

I remember one time more particularly; it was right in the heat of summer. We were going to cut our little grain in a day or two, and were out of fuel; and we knew that, when we began cutting, we ought not to leave it a minute for anything else. So we took a day and went to the "Oaks" to gather up what we could of these scraps. It was a bright, clear morning, and hot enough for any ordinary purpose when we started out. But towards noon the sun began to strike down upon us with terrific force; and, as we had been working all the morning as hard as we could in the deep gulches, with not a breath of air stirring, we became almost famished of thirst. We had taken along a little to eat, but had nothing to drink. We had foolishly gone off without taking a jug of water along, and we could discover no hole containing a little water anywhere about in the gulches, as sometimes could be found. We tried to eat a little, but our mouths were so parched that in trying to swallow a little of the food it seemed determined to stick fast in our throats, and refused to make the passage, and that we would choke. We had no inclination to start back home as early as it was and so little on our wagon, so we kept on working, as

the sun kept on pouring its shafts of intense heat down upon us, which seemed to add to its intensity as the minutes passed. About three o'clock in the afternoon, having gone to the fullest extreme that we could endure, we started for home. As we made our way up out of the deep gulches, that awful craving increased, and it seemed that we could not bear it till we reached home. There was not a single settler for some miles around to whose place we might go and slake our thirst; for there was none of the land in that region "taken up" at that time, being too "rough" for any purpose, as it was thought. But O, what a horrible sensation! I often think about it even now. And if only a few hours of such intense thirst is enough to cause so much suffering, the thought has sometimes come to me, what indeed must be the torture of those of whom we hear and read sometimes, sailors and others, who have found refuge from the wrecked ship in a little boat, or on a raft afforded by some small portion of the broken-up vessel, tossed hither and thither for days and nights together on the crest of the angry billows, and one after another falling victims to a crazed mind on account of the awful craving for fresh water! Our little experience, which was nothing at all in comparison with these, yet, it seems to me, was enough to afford a sufficient realization of how desperate must be the condition of these unfortunates.

After we had gone along the road a mile or so, Edgar, who was always ready to do almost anything and take almost any risk, said to me: "Father, I must have some water some way! Let me run down to Allen's and get me a drink, and I'll get something and put some water in, and run back and meet you." But without waiting

for an answer, he was gone. Allen's place was a couple of miles or more away, and he set out on a run across the prairie, up over hills, and down through deep gulches, making as straight a line for the Allen claim as he could. I called to him not to hurry too much; but he was away over the hills and out of sight in a few minutes.

The heat was so intense that the oxen were just panting for breath, and, putting out their long tongues, they swayed from side to side as they walked along. Edgar must have kept up his running gait nearly all the way; for we had traveled only a little over a mile—we moved along exceedingly slow—when we saw him coming over the hills scarcely a mile away, and in a little while he came up to us. He was puffing and panting like the oxen were, and was lugging a gallon earthenware jug three parts full of water. What with the extreme heat and the exertion together I was afraid that it would go ill with him; but nothing serious resulted. Letting Ernest first take a drink, and, fearing lest it might make him sick, I cautioned him to take only a little at a time. We sat down under the shade of the wagon a little while, and when we started on again we carried an empty jug along.

After this experience, it may be relied upon that whenever we visited the "Oaks" in the hot days of summer a vessel of some kind well filled with water always accompanied us. But that did not occur often; for, as I have intimated, the time at that season of the year was too precious, and had to be spent in other ways.

In these early days we were not unmindful or indifferent with regard to the educational interests of the children. In our section, the first summer, we hardly made a start to do anything; in fact, we had not formed a school

district. But this year a district was organized, and was the seventh in the county. The first meeting that we held was at the house of one of the neighbors, and five out of the eight men in the district were present. Of course, we had no place in which to hold school, and the matter of building a schoolhouse was discussed. Some were so reckless as to be in favor of voting bonds for the purpose of building a house right there and then. All except myself were inclined to that idea; but, being fearful of the consequences if such a course should be adopted, I used every argument that I could bring to bear against the project. I tried to show how utterly ruinous it would be to the taxpayers of the little district, when, as yet, we had raised scarcely anything in the way of crops, and, so far as we could see, there was no brighter prospect ahead of us. Altogether, there were only nineteen children in the district. Four out of that number were under school age, and three or four of the oldest boys were able to attend school only a part of the time on account of their help being needed at home. One of the families of four children lived too far away to attend school, so that there were not more than from seven to nine children who could really be counted as scholars. And yet for this handful of children, and right squarely in the face of the distressed condition in which nearly all were placed, these men were in favor of voting bonds. It was further suggested that the bonds be "fixed" so as to run "a good long time," so that, other settlers coming in, a great share of the burden would fall upon them. I myself, however, felt pretty sure that we would, some day in the future, suffer for our rashness if we should adopt the course suggested.

My proposition was this: That we build a sod school-house, and fix it up neatly and comfortably, so that it might serve the purpose for a number of years, if need be. It would cost but a few dollars, simply for the door and windows and floor, and perhaps a board roof. For we could—if we would—do all the work ourselves, and it would cost no outlay of money. But my plan failed to attract them, and it fell through, as we say.

One of the young unmarried men in the district, who owned a claim adjoining ours, had a little bit of a shack about ten feet by twelve; simply boards, with no siding, ceiling, or plaster, or anything of the kind. The owner being away and making no use of the building—if we may call it that—let the district have the use of it for the first term of school. The board engaged a teacher, or one to teach, rather; for she was quite a young girl, and had never taught before. The plea that the county superintendent afterwards made for granting her a third grade certificate was that “they were in need.”

That year we had three months’ school, just enough to entitle the district to a claim for State apportionment of school funds. The next year we had no school, for the reason that we had no place to hold it. But in the summer of 1875 the question of building was again brought to the front. It was the previous year, 1874, it will be remembered, when the grasshoppers were so destructive, and, although we had suffered so much loss, and in spite of all the pleadings that I might make, bonds were voted and the house was built that fall. It was only a small building, about twelve by sixteen feet. Our nearest neighbor, who was a carpenter by trade, secured the contract and built the house. The material, of course,

had to be hauled a distance of fifty miles. Three out of the four who cast their vote for the bonds had each a team, and, as a matter of course, secured the job of hauling the lumber. Putting all these things together, the reader is left to draw his own conclusions. The house was finished, and again another young girl was engaged to teach.

CHAPTER XXIV

Neighborhood and Family Reminiscences

As a means to afford a little recreation and amusement during the winter evenings, the children used to go to the schoolhouse, usually on Friday evenings, and entertain themselves as best they could by having what they called a "spelling bee"—"spelling one another down." To the onlooker there might seem little to interest in this pastime, but somehow it afforded them considerable pleasure, and perhaps it was not altogether void of educational results, in a small way, although they may not have had that special object in view.

At the time about which I am speaking, however, they were meeting in the schoolhouse downtown, and had what they called a lyceum. This kind of institution, it will be remembered, was in vogue with the four or five who were baching together in the little frame building when we made our advent into the new country. The program was made up of recitations, dialogues, debates, short papers—or, at least, they had the name for all these things—and sometimes some extremely grotesque representations in tableaux. They had also a weekly paper, to which all might contribute. Whether or not this last item on the program was along the line of improvement I would hardly like to say. I know, however, that some very funny things found their way into the paper, as well as many more that were not so funny. At least, so

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thought some at whom the articles it contained were hurled. Whilst the paper was being read, one or two, perhaps, would be looking exceedingly glum, to use their own expression. Their faces would be spread all over with a deep crimson, which went to show that what was fun for some was not fun for all. The shot, of course, did not always strike in one place, but all, in turn, had to take whatever had been prepared for them. These sharp-pointed arrows would dart out from the little paper, flying in all directions, striking one here and another there, wounding one, and maiming another. Doubtless there was not the least ill intent in anything that was written, but wherever the arrow struck, the effect appeared to be the same, for all that. And as they left the room one and another would be heard saying, "If they do n't quit that business I sha'n't come any more."

On other evenings, when our boys were at home, they usually occupied their time reading, hardly ever being without reading matter of some kind. I remember one time a gentleman, an utter stranger, living in one of the New England States—Rowe was his name; I have n't forgotten that—sent me the *Congregationalist*. It came to me weekly for about six months. Our good lady friend in St. Louis also used to send out to the boys a bundle of old newspapers occasionally. This winter the boys, two of them at least, Edgar and Ernest, found a little change in music and voice culture. W. H. Hosford, who was then superintendent of public instruction, and also teaching the Albion schools, organized a singing-school, and the two boys entered the class, and used to go down to the little schoolhouse two nights a week to practice. It mattered little to the boys what kind of weather it was. If cold and stormy and half-way up to their knees in snow,

if a dog could stand it to be out, why surely they could be a match for a dog ; and they always went afoot. Nothing would prevent them from being at the place where their duty lay, and at the appointed time. An excellent practice in itself; for it is said that "punctuality is a virtue."

I can very well remember some pretty lively and exciting times centering about that old schoolhouse when voters from all over the county would crowd into the little space at the time of some political Convention. There seemed to be equally as many place-hunters in those early days as there are at the present time, evincing the same anxiety to get into office as they do now. There were always half a dozen or more aspirants for each office to be filled. Some would talk very loud and long, such as it was, as though the whole assembly in the little room were very hard of hearing ; but the great bulk of talk was usually more amusing than edifying. I recollect one time there was a man over from the "Cedar;" He had not been in the county long, and it was the first time I had seen him. I presume he was looking for a job, if he could find something that would suit him. Well, he got up on one of the desks and made a speech. He seemed to have a very bad cold, and his voice was in a terrible state of huskiness ; and on that account, I suppose, he had tied around his neck a big red handkerchief. Hoarse as he was, he beat all the rest for loud talking, and when he had done speaking, his huskiness was still more husky. However, a good amount of emphasis often produces a great effect upon the hearers, though there be but little or no sense in what may be said. And so it seemed to be on this occasion ; for some could be seen nodding and winking back and forth to each other across the little room,

as much as to say: "He's just the right kind of a fellow to put in somewhere! He's a fine talker, ain't he?" It so happened, some years afterwards, after fishing for a good long time, that his admirers did put him in "somewhere." But whether he made himself hoarse by making loud and long speeches in the interest of those who put him there, after he got where he had the chance, I am unable to say.

So far as we in our own home were concerned, we were by no means at a loss to know what to do with ourselves the long winter evenings. As well as reading, about which I have before spoken, we would frequently fall into discussion on various topics, mostly of a religious nature, and would usually be at work of some kind at the same time. It came naturally in Edgar's way to take charge of the patching and mending of boots and shoes, and he became so skilled that he could do a neat and substantial job. He supplied himself with a few tools necessary for such work. Ernest, perhaps, would be mending his clothes, his mother at the time being unable to do anything, maybe; though she often did more than she ought to have done, so that it was necessary to scold a little, if we may so call it, on that account. But when she saw anything needing to be done, it was the hardest thing possible for her to keep her hands off; and it seemed almost a useless effort to try to check her. Leonard, the youngest, if he was not at work, it may be sure had a book, reading, or was studying something; for, though so young, his mind was fixed on that. When he was about six or seven years old, he used to afford us a good deal of amusement by preaching to us, as he called it. He would stand with his back against the wall or the door, and talk in the most earnest fashion about "God's love

for us," and that, if we did not love him, we would not go to heaven. The range of words was very limited; consequently, if the sermon happened to be more than a few minutes long, there was necessarily a good deal of repetition. But that which was lacking on that account was more than compensated for by gesticulation, for his hands and arms were constantly flying in all directions. He would ask the strangest questions sometimes with regard to religious things, that would puzzle a theologian to answer, and not being that, of course we could not answer him.

We had about this time, including the oxen, seven head of cattle. These, with the exception of the oxen when they were at work, he used to take over the hills to herd, and would be gone all day, simply bringing them in at noon to get his dinner. There he would stay, out of sight of everybody, maybe, the whole day long. What a dreary, wearisome life it seems it must have been for a little fellow like him! He used to say that he was lonesome; but he always strived to make the very best of the situation. His mother had a little, old Bible—not so very old, either—but it looked old from the much wear that it had had. She had turned the leaves so often that it was all in a shattered condition. Leonard used to beg a few of the loose leaves of this well-worn Book to read and study out there in the hills as he watched the cattle. He came, also, to be an authority on the weather. He watched very closely the wind and rain and the different signs, and kept a tabulated daily record. So his mind was kept constantly occupied, and there was not so much time for thought about the lonesomeness of the situation. But it was not his main purpose in doing this, if at all, to drive away the loneliness; he had a higher motive than that. He got so accustomed to watching the signs that

he could tell pretty closely when a storm was coming, and would hurry in his cattle. Storms, with terrific thunder and lightning, would, however, burst upon us so suddenly and so furiously that he would sometimes get caught; and then, of course, some of the rest of us would hasten to his aid. And after we got horses in the place of oxen, Edgar would mount one of them, and, without saddle or bridle, go flying over the hills like a wild boy, to help drive in the cattle. Edgar always thought that there was something more than common wrapped up in the mind and heart of his little brother. But alas! he was not permitted to stay and watch its development.

One time, soon after our arrival in Columbus, when he was only five years old, he was in the room with the people in whose house we were living. The man and his wife were there together, and the child, very innocently, yet earnestly, looking up into the man's face, said to him, "Do you love God?" The woman afterwards told the child's mother that her husband seemed dumbfounded at the question put to him, and that he could n't answer a word. Judging from what we knew of the man, he may have given little thought to such a vital matter before, and so said nothing. He told his wife that never in all his life had such a question been put to him before by any one. I wonder if that set him thinking on the subject for the first time.

From quite a child even, there were traits discernible in him peculiarly strange. Not alone did we ourselves observe this, but others also took note of it. As he grew older it was noticeable that he possessed originality of thought and ideas to a marked degree. I remember one time a minister speaking to me about him. This was when he was about seventeen years old, and was, I think,

somewhere about the time when he first offered prayer in public in the church. The minister said to me: "I have been struck with the originality and variedness of words and expression in Leonard's prayers; so different from older people even, whose utterances usually have so much of sameness about them—a sort of stereotyped repetition of words."

A little incident comes to my mind which occurred when he was scarcely four years old, and which it seemed his mother could never forget, for she often repeated the story. He did not walk—run, as the expression has it in England—till he was three and a half years old or more. He was weak in his loins and his legs, and could scarcely stand upon his feet. This was caused, so the doctors said at least, by cutting his teeth. So his mother used to take him to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, in London, for treatment. Just at this time he was getting so that he could walk a little. Coming home from the hospital one day, after getting out of the bustle of the city, his mother lifted him out of the perambulator—baby carriage we would call it in this country—to let him walk a few steps. He could n't make much of an out at walking, however, for his legs were bound tightly in splints, extending almost from his hips clear to his ankles. He had gone only a few steps when all of a sudden he caught sight of two young urchins a little distance ahead apparently engaged in a quarrel. They were on the curbstone at the edge of the pavement—sidewalk. One of them had the other on the ground, and, bending over him, was giving him a good pummeling. As soon as the child caught a glimpse of them, he started towards them, shuffling along as fast as he knew how. One of the boys being on the ground, and the other being in a stooping

position and having his back towards him, did not see the child as he came up to them. His mother, now seeing the determined look on his face as he pressed his teeth together and prepared for the onset, and, realizing what he was about to do, called to him and was hastening after him, fearing that the boys would turn upon him and he would be hurt. But she was too late; for, going up to the boy who had the other one down, he seized him by the collar in both hands, and shook him with all his might, which, of course, did not amount to very much; but, as his mother said, "by the way he went to work about it, if he had had the strength, it seemed as though he would have shaken the boy's head clean off his shoulders, and it would have gone rolling in the gutter." But nothing amused her so much as the way the boys took it; and it afforded her a good hearty laugh every time she told the story. She, of course, expected nothing else than that the boy would resent the interference with his fun, or whatever he called it, and turn upon the child and retaliate, and she would have trouble. But the attack was made so suddenly that it was like a shock of electricity, and the boy seemed hardly to know where he was, and doubtless supposed that a "bobby"—policeman—was clutching him by the collar. As the boy's head was hurriedly vibrating this way and that from the shaking up he was undergoing, he turned himself, his eyes and mouth stretching open to their extreme capacity. He was so amazed that he could n't utter a word. It seemed as though he could not make himself believe that the little fellow tottering there before him was he who had held him in so tight a grip. Surveying the child for a moment in utter astonishment, without uttering word, he scam-

pered off down the street as fast as he could go. The other boy, having gained his release, seemed not any the less puzzled than did the first, and scrambling up from the ground, made off as fast as his legs would carry him, in an opposite direction.

His mother always had an intensely strong desire that one, at least, of her boys should become a minister of the gospel. Was there a foreshadowing in anything we have seen in the child to give encouragement that that desire might some day be gratified? As time moves on we may see.

I find, amongst old letters and papers, a composition of Leonard's own production, written, it may be, whilst over there in the hills away from everybody, but perhaps before that time; I think very likely the latter. I will give it to the reader in form and words copied from the original, and without making alterations or corrections in any way:

A TRIP FROM ENGLAND TO ALBION.

[From my native land, England.]

"We came across. the atlantic ocean. When we were on deck they had a meeting and while they were playing the fiddle up came a ship. We just got by in time or our ship would have been cut in two it was forunate that we did not get drowned. We came from New. York then to St. Louis in a train then to Columbus then to Albion. We made a dugout and went in there. We went up to our house, when I got up to it I said is that what the Indians built? Then we went back to the dugout. We were there one night. While we were there the first day Father and Edgar and Ernest went up to the house to

clean it out. A storm came up sone and a ravine of water, came down it and we had to go back to the store. Then we moved into a house that Father and Mr. Kingham made and remained there till we done the other house."

The "meeting" and the "fiddle" and some other things he has got a little mixed, I presume. The meeting, doubtless, has reference to divine service held in the dining saloon of the ship on Sunday mornings, which was conducted by the captain, the Church of England service being used. But the fiddle had to do with quite a different kind of meeting. A young man, one of the passengers on board, had a violin along, and, to pass the time, some of the steerage passengers used to get on deck of an evening and shuffle around a little, which they called dancing, I suppose, keeping time to the music. Two young men from the south part of London, who rode on the train with us to Liverpool, were also passengers on the ship, and made considerable fun whilst engaged in this pastime. One of them, having procured from some of the passengers different articles of female attire, dressed himself up in them, and the two formed partners, and cut some of the queerest antics you ever saw, and for the time kept the whole deck, full of spectators, in a continuous roar of laughter. So that is where the fiddle came into play, and not in the "meeting" on Sunday morning, as the reader might be led to suppose from the wording of the youthful author's composition.

Now that our wheat has been threshed, and we have been to the mill and got a supply of flour, that, with the aid of a large proportion of cornmeal, will carry us through the winter, possibly. When we pay back to neighbors what we have borrowed here and there, after

calculating how much we will need for seed for the spring sowing, we find that we have a little that we can sell. It must be sold, for we have to pay for wheat of a different kind which was necessary to buy for seed the year before. There are other little debts, also, which seemed absolutely necessary to be incurred in order to live and perform our work. So a journey to Columbus with this little surplus wheat has to be made, however much it may be dreaded.

CHAPTER XXV

Perilous Journeys

AS MENTIONED in the last chapter, it was necessary to make a journey to Columbus to dispose of the few surplus bushels of wheat.

This trip I made alone, which fact I have good reason to remember, for I was in greater danger of being frozen as solid as a rock than at any other time that I am aware of. Although severely cold, I got along pretty well journeying to Columbus; but during the night a terrible wind came up from the north, bringing with it the most intense cold. I had staid in a store that night, as was our custom, for we had become familiarly acquainted with the storekeeper. We felt that we could not afford to take nice hot meals and a comfortable bed at a hotel, as many seemed to, whether they could afford it or not. So we gladly availed ourselves of the hospitality of the bright and exceedingly polite young storekeeper. We used to spread our blankets on the floor as near to the stove as would be safe, and there lay ourselves down. There was not much spring to the bed, and our bones would feel a little sore the next morning, but with a little exercise that would soon wear off. But there was satisfaction in knowing that we had not gone in debt on that account. I am sorry to say it, that this bright young man formed a habit of visiting the drugstore nearby and associating with the proprietor, who soon afterward found his way into a

drunkard's grave; and not long after, and by the same road, he was followed by this young man himself.

When I got up from the floor the next morning the wind was shrieking and howling around the corners of the buildings, and I could see by the thick frost that had gathered on the windows that the thermometer must have dropped away down. As I crossed the street, the wind, which was blowing terrifically from the north, was carrying old papers and other refuse and dust in clouds, so that I could scarcely see to the other side. The coarse sand struck me in the face with such force that it seemed like so many needle points sticking into my flesh, which made it tingle again. I had bought a new ax, and, before starting out, I went into a wagon repairing shop to fit a handle into it. The man in the shop said to me, "Where are you from?" "I'm from Boone County," I replied. He had understood, from some remark that I had made, that I was getting ready to start out for home; and, stopping his work for a moment, and looking at me in rather an astonished kind of way, said again: "But you're never going to start on the road in such weather as this, are you?" "Yes," I said, "that's what I'm calculating on doing." "But," said he, "you'll freeze to death before you get half way to Genoa." "Yes," said I, "it does look as though I shall have a pretty tough time; but I can't stay here very long without its costing me something, and I have n't any money to spare for that kind of thing." I hardly need say that it was not for the pleasure derived from these journeys that we often risked so much; very much more than we were aware, sometimes. But the one thought that all the time seemed to be pressing hard on my mind, both day and night, was any little debts that might be due, and all that we had to raise a little money

was these few bushels of wheat. We could scarcely buy the smallest article on credit without giving a note and paying large interest. As time went on we found that we could not farm without implements to work with, and, consequently, the debts grew larger. But they were a mere trifle compared with the debts of many others, but enough to bring me a good deal of worry, so that I always felt afraid to spend a cent for things that would contribute to our comfort, or even for things necessary. And thus it was on this occasion. Gladly enough would I have staid by the side of some warm stove, or under shelter of some kind, had the circumstances been favorable. But they were a good way from that, and so these hard, tough experiences had to be endured.

I went at once from the shop to the barn, and hitched the oxen to the wagon as quickly as I could, and started out. Tying my hat down over my ears, I bound my head about with a big, long scarf, so that there was but little of my face exposed to the weather; but, little as it was, when struck by the freezing wind, it seemed almost as though it would flay the skin. I had on three coats—a small undercoat, my overcoat, and over these a big old overcoat that came in the box from St. Louis. When the collar was turned up, scarcely any part of my head could be seen, and it reached down to my toes, and I can't hardly imagine the kind of a guy I must have looked. But there were few who saw me; it was not the kind of day to be out seeking pleasure or objects of curiosity. I had gone only a short distance when I felt myself getting chilled clear through. I had on a pair of mittens made of cloth. They had been patched and covered, covered and patched so many times that they were several thicknesses of cloth. But for all that I had the hardest

work possible to keep my hands from freezing. I beat them together, and against my thighs, and crouched down as I walked along by the side of old Jack so as to break the force of the wind. I hurried on the oxen as fast as I could, and I suppose they were going at a good brisk gait, but somehow to me they seemed to be going dreadfully slow. I was so muffled up that it was no easy matter for me to walk, and yet I was so terribly cold that it seemed I would certainly freeze. Everything about me seemed as cold as solid ice, and I began to think that I could not possibly hold out to get through to Genoa. I then took one of the heavy comforters from the wagon and put it over my head, and enveloped myself in it completely, resting my hand on the ox to guide me. And so I trudged along, stamping my feet heavily on the hard, frozen ground, trying all the time to prevent the blood from becoming congealed and stop circulation. When I had gone as far as George Lehman's place, which lay a little back from the road about half way to Genoa, I felt strongly tempted to drive across the prairie and put in there for the rest of the day. "But, if no one should be there," I thought, "who could take care of the team?" for I could do nothing with them myself, having no use at all of my hands. And at the same time dreading to disturb my wrappings, I continued on. Along about four o'clock in the afternoon the strong gale that had been piercing me through and through the whole day long began gradually to subside, and by the time I came up to the "Looking-glass," and it began to get dusk, it had ceased entirely. Walking all day under circumstances the most trying, I began to get sore from chafing, and, as the wind had now ceased, I thought that I would try and ride a little. So, after crossing the creek, I climbed into the

seat in rather a clumsy fashion, I presume, for I felt just about as stiff as a stick of wood, and tried to persuade myself that I could stand it to ride the rest of the way, about a couple of miles or so. Although the wind had gone down, the air was most bitterly cold, and as I looked across the Loup away to the south, large patches of snow peeped out here and there between the big, tall, leafless cottonwoods that lined the river on either side. The sun, which had hidden himself away all through the day behind one big black cloud that covered the whole heavens, now, as he was about to retire behind the hills for the night, seemed to be having rather a hard time struggling to let me see him in all his brilliancy for one moment before saying good-night. He did not succeed well, however, for I could only faintly discern his outline through the long, streaky, gray-looking clouds, full of coldness, stretching themselves in extended lines along the horizon. My imagination of what it must be in the icy regions of the north is drawn simply from what I have read of the experiences of others; but as I looked out over the broad expanse of country stretched out before me, and as the shades of evening were casting themselves over the face of the whole landscape, with not a voice to be heard, and no sound save the ringing of the ax in the hands of the chopper away off near the river as it came in contact with the big log, preparing something with which to give warmth to himself and his family that bitter cold night; like a ventriloquist, the ring of the ax echoing and re-echoing in the distant and different parts of the surrounding country miles away; and a picture of the lonesomeness, and wearisome in its very lonesomeness, of something of the way it must be up in those regions of perpetual snow and ice and cold came

to me, I thought it could not be very far from a correct one. Weary and footsore from the day's hard treatment, and beginning now to feel the effects of fasting, since I had taken only the "little bite" just before going out from the store, I had hoped for a better fate; but I had gone not more than half a mile when I could stand it no longer to ride. The short ride that I had, made me feel worse than before; for I was more stiff and sore than when I mounted the wagon; and henceforward it was more a kind of hobbling, or shuffling, that I did. It was quite dark when I reached Genoa, and, knowing that I could not take care of the team, I drove into the yard to the house, which stood a little back from the road. Mr. Dresser was still staying there, and as soon as he heard me drive up, he came out. When he found who I was he seemed greatly astonished, and exclaimed: "Why, how in the world could you think of venturing out such a day as this! I should think you must be a solid chunk of ice!" "Yes," I said, "I do feel pretty well congealed, but I'm in hopes there may yet be in me a few drops of liquid matter; enough, at least, to start circulation, and thaw out the rest as soon as I can get into a more congenial atmosphere than I've had to endure the last eight or nine hours." I asked him if he would take care of the team. "For," said I, "though my hands, I think, are not frozen, I have n't the least use in them." "Never you mind about the team," said he. "You just get right into the house, and I'll attend to that." It may be taken for granted that no second injunction was needed in order that I might obey; but I got into the house as fast as my two very stiff legs would carry me. I had not seen a single person on the road the whole day long, which would indicate the kind of day it was. When

I entered the room, I saw that there were three other men there from Boone County. They had all been to Columbus, and had come out the evening before as far as Lehman's place, and staid there all night. All except one had horses, and he had mules, and they had all started out that morning for home. But as they got some little way on the road, and realized more and more the severity and roughness of the weather, they whipped up their horses, and were not long reaching Genoa. Here they hurriedly put away their teams, and in a few minutes were all huddled around the stove, in which was a big, blazing fire. They, too, were a good deal surprised to see me; and when I told them that I had been out all day crouching by the side of the big ox, "Jack," they looked more than ever amazed. "Why," said one, "I would n't have been walking in your shoes all day for any money!" They had been keeping up such a roaring fire that when I opened the door the steam puffed out in a cloud, and it was almost like going into an oven. The men helped to unravel me from my many coats and wrappings, and I was roasting myself before the fire more than an hour before I began to feel my natural self come back to me. My head drooped, and in spite of all my efforts to keep my eyelids apart, they seemed determined to close down and shut out the light. After sufficient roasting, the clotted blood in my veins began to dissolve and to make its accustomed rounds. I thought then that I might venture out into the dining-room, and still further stimulate circulation by the aid of a warm supper. I had some bread, and, by way of luxury, a little piece of cheese that I had bought at Columbus, out there in the wagon; but if I attempted to eat that, there was little doubt in

my mind which of the two, the adamantized bread and cheese, or my teeth, would be the first to break. I was always hoping for the best, and however unfavorable the outlook, was never daunted, but always looked for the better times that we used to sing about more than a half-century ago, "There's a good time coming, boys; wait a little longer;" and we were still waiting, thinking they would surely come some day, when my grinders would serve me in good turn. So I thought it not wise to break them all up and disable them for future usefulness over this bread-and-cheese kind of flint. So, under these extremely distressing circumstances, I persuaded myself to think that it would hardly amount to a sin, even if I had not the money just then to pay for it, if I did place myself at the dining-room table with the host and his family. When I made my exit I felt almost as though I had been run through some kind of renovating machine and made over anew.

When we arose the next morning all was bright and clear, but as the keen air and my face came in close contact it seemed as though the skin would be stripped off. As soon as breakfast was over, we all hitched up our teams and set out for home. All the other men started out on a pretty lively trot; but with me it was different, being compelled to keep the drony old ox gait. After the rest that the night had afforded I felt my stiffness and soreness more than ever; so I thought that if I did any riding at all, now would be the time to do it before I began to freeze up again. The thermometer may have been lower than the day previous, but there being no wind made a wonderful difference. Mounting the seat, I covered myself all over with a comforter, and with the ex-

clamation, "Get up, Jack and Dick!" off we started. As we moved away from the barn, and passed the long double row of corncribs, built by the Government, and along the road which ran near to the hills, on the summit of which was the Indian burying-ground, I came to the top of a little rise in the road, and caught a momentary glimpse of the other teams rattling along at a brisk speed, and that was the last I saw of them. It was one of those bright, clear mornings, the atmosphere so pure that a person speaking in an ordinary tone of voice could be heard distinctly quite a long way off. I could hear the rumbling of the wagons as they rattled along on the hard-frozen ground three or four miles away; and they reached home about noon. But my fortune did not run in so smooth and easy a channel. I remained in my seat as long as I could bear it, which was not very long, and then got down and walked. I never was an adept at riding very much, and always did very much more walking than riding when on the road; but there were times when I would have preferred to ride if the conditions had been favorable, and this was one of them. But so it is all along, we have to take things as they come, "for better, for worse," the good and the bad, the pleasant and the unpleasant, and mix them up together and make the best we can out of them. There are no sad or unpleasant happenings but what might be very much worse. And this reminds me of the oft-repeated remark of my wife, when some ill may have happened, whether concerning our own family or of others, it made no difference: "Thank God it's no worse! It might have been so much worse than it is." And so it was with me on this occasion. I was in a condition that made walking not alone unpleasant, but painful; but I mixed them up together,

walking a little, and riding a little. There was not much choice between the two, however; but perchance there might be a pleasanter side to something else some day.

“There is no grove on earth’s broad chart,
That has no bird to cheer it;
So hope sings on, in every heart,
Although we may not hear it:
And if, to-day, the heavy wing
Of sorrow is oppressing,
Perchance to-morrow’s sun will bring
The weary heart a blessing.
For life is sometimes bright and fair,
And sometimes dark and lonely;
Let us forget its toil and care,
And note its bright hours only.”

All the day long the oxen marched along, step against step, with backs humped up and heads bent down, swaying from side to side. And as the hot breath from their nostrils shot out before them and came in contact with the freezing atmosphere, it looked like clouds of steam puffing from a locomotive. It was almost dark by the time I reached home. The folks were eagerly watching for me, though they hardly expected to see me that night, thinking that I would not be on the road traveling such a day as the one previous. Edgar at once took charge of the oxen, and I went into the house. By what the reader has already learned, it need hardly be stated that my wife, during the last two days, had been in a high state of anxiety and fear on account of my absence and the sudden and violent change in the weather. As she stood there for a moment gazing into my face, with clasped hands slightly raised, and with a slight movement of her lips, as I was trying to get myself loose from so much that I was bound up in, the first words to be

heard fall from her lips were, "O, thank God you've got home safe!" Then followed a string of questions, many of which I did not answer fully; for, as I began to relate only a little of my experience, her countenance suddenly changed, and took on a distressed and pitying look. She suffered enough from knowing as much as she did of these things, so at times like these the picture was always tempered considerably, never being painted in all the detail of light and shade. I did not feel just at that time very much like singing; but if I had attempted to sing at all, I have an idea that it would have been that true old song, "Home, sweet home."

But there was no way of avoiding these unpleasant and often perilous journeys. To procure wood for fuel and for other purposes was quite a bother to us on account of having to make such long trips to get it and the hard work involved, situated as it was in cañons and deep gulches, even if we did feel safe from getting into trouble over it. As I may have stated before, there had been some arrests made for taking wood off the Pawnee Reservation, and we were not inclined to risk so much. So we fell back again on our old friends in Antelope County. And so, with what we procured in this way, and what we found on our own place, we managed to get through another winter.

It is hardly to be wondered at if a feeling of dread did sometimes come over us when the time arrived to make one of these journeys, as we think of what we sometimes experienced in making them. I remember one time especially. We were going to the mill at Oakdale; there was a good deal of snow on the ground, and the weather was intensely cold. Edgar was with me, and we were plodding along slowly behind the wagon up over the hills

to the north and onto the divide. The snow was six or seven inches deep, and the track had not been broken; for it was a road seldom traveled, there being no settlers after we got up out of the little valley until we came near Oakdale, away into the adjoining county. Of course, we used to call them roads; but they were merely the grass and turf worn away where the horses or oxen walked, with a ridge between; two narrow black lines like a couple of snakes stretching and winding across miles and miles of open prairie. The snow made it very hard and difficult to walk, and it was too cold to ride, so we tried to walk in the tracks of the oxen, but that made it still harder. We had gone but a few miles when our hands became so completely benumbed that all feeling had left them. We usually made our own mittens out of old cloth, of which we would have two or three pairs sometimes, one over another; or, as I have said before, they would be so patched that there would be several thicknesses of cloth. But for all that, it was the hardest thing possible, sometimes, to keep them from freezing. As the morning wore away we began to feel a little hungry; and I never forgot the sad plight we were in. We had along with us some dry soda biscuits cut in two, and a little butter spread between, in a common flour-bag. They occupied but a small space, of course, so we tied the bag in a knot instead of tying it with a string. We tried to untie it, but could not do so with our mittens on, and, cold as it was, we took them off, but not without some difficulty; for our hands were nearly closed, and neither of us seemed to have the least use in them. We fumbled and fumbled a little while, but finding we could not do it that way, we held down the bag and pulled the knot apart with our teeth. Raking out three or four of the

biscuits, which rattled almost like so many flint pebbles, we held up the biscuit between our two fists, and gnawed away at it in that way. This reminded me of the monkeys in the Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park, London. When children and others would pass through the bars of their big cage a cookie, an apple, or anything of that kind, they would snatch it, and in an instant be sitting away up on their perch, and, holding it up between their paws, would munch away at it just the same way we did with our biscuit. There being no settlers all along for many miles, there was no place where we could put in and stay for a time and get "thawed out," as we used to say. And that was the hardest part of it; for one might manage to endure such a severe strain for an hour or two, or for several hours, perhaps; but when it had to be borne a whole day, and perhaps away into the night, it took considerable courage to keep up under such intense and protracted physical torture.

CHAPTER XXVI

A Miserable Night

It was drawing towards the close of the winter of 1874-5, and we must needs go to the mill again, for we could not afford to wait till the spring work had commenced before making the journey. We had also made calculations to "put in" a good many young trees and cuttings the coming spring, and therefore was loath to encroach to the extent of a minute on what might be called spring weather. We had heard that a mill had recently been built at Neligh. This was also in Antelope County, and was located on the Elkhorn River, about five miles above Oakdale. The mill was a brick building, and was put up by a man named Gallaway, who had settled there three or four years before, and previous to the organization of the county. For some reason, instead of the wagon-box, we had a couple of boards laid on the trucks, or "running gear," of the wagon, and on these we placed our few sacks of wheat. We had very little food along with us; for we had little or nothing in the way of provisions in the house, and flour amongst the neighbors had also been exhausted. But it happened that I had a few cents in my pocket, and we thought that we might be able to buy a loaf or two of bread when we came to the settlement in Antelope County. So Edgar and I, as usual, started out together. When night overtook us, we found ourselves a little way beyond our friend King's

place. The house stood on the open prairie, off a little from the road, but as it was getting dusk, we did not call, but pushed on about a mile and a half further. It was almost dark when we drove up to a haystack not far from the road. Here we unhitched the oxen, and prepared to spend the night. The weather was pleasant during the day, but cold and freezing hard at night. At such times as these there was little sleep to be had, when the wolves and coyotes were yelping and howling their hideous noises the whole night long. One would imagine there must be a hundred of them in company, instead, perhaps, of one-twentieth of that number. They would sometimes approach so near about us as to be not altogether agreeable; for we often felt constrained to rise up and peer about us to see if we could espy any of these sharp-nosed, foxy little creatures. And it did not always produce the happiest moods when we felt compelled to poke our heads out from under the covering and come suddenly in contact with the stinging night air.

As soon as the morning light came we were on the road again. But remembering that our Heavenly Father was always and everywhere present, whether in the old sod house with the family all there together, or out on the broad open prairie, or in the bottom of some deep gulch away off in the timber, we had not forgotten first to bow our heads, if not our knees, and in a few humble, but earnest and devout words, acknowledge his protecting care through the night, though but the canopy of heaven had been over us, and ask that a continuance of the same be vouchsafed through the day. Wherever we might be, or whatever the circumstances or conditions, this was a duty not to be neglected. We did not pretend to perform this in any formal or ceremonious way, but adapted it to

the situation in which we found ourselves; for we had come to think that God, who has so much love and mercy for his own, did not require it that we should, when shaking like the trembling aspen, and suffering intense physical pain from the cold, deliberately kneel in a formal way as we would in our own humble home. So we felt that he would not be angry with us for leaving this duty undone till we had hid ourselves away under our coverings to get as safely as we could from the biting frost; or, if in the morning, if we felt it more to the interest of our physical well-being that this be done before we crawled out from our hiding-place, which would be thickly covered with the hoary frost, it was performed thus; or it might be deferred till we had gotten some distance on the road, when the sun would begin to have its effect on everything all around, and it would be a little more pleasant, we would stop in the road a few minutes, and bow our heads on the hind end of the wagon, or on the long poles extending out beyond, and send up the morning sacrifice of thanksgiving, feeling fully confident that God would hear. Then we would go on again, trying all the time to believe that whatever might happen, all would be well, although, so far as we could see, often seemingly not so.

“The steps of faith
Fall on the seeming void
And find the rock beneath.”

We traveled on till we came to a house near the road; so I went and inquired the way we should take, and the one pointed out led us into quite an extent of sand-hills. At the same time I asked the woman if she could sell me a loaf of bread, explaining that we had left home with not enough to carry us through, and she handed me two

loaves. She asked where we had come from, and questions such as that, and a conversation of several minutes followed. It so came out that the woman was a relative of our friend, Mrs. King, who had spoken to her about our having staid with them sometimes; and as soon as I mentioned my name she at once recognized us as being the same persons, and a new acquaintance and friends were at once made. I wanted to pay for the bread, but she refused to accept anything; and as I insisted that she should—for I always felt greater satisfaction in giving an equivalent, in some way, for anything that I might receive—she just as strongly protested, and there seemed no other way than to leave it so.

Taking the road to the left, we plodded on, and soon came into the range of sand-hills. There were several miles of winding between these hills to traverse, and the sand being loose, it impeded our progress, and we traveled slowly. As we descended off the hills into the valley and drew near to the river, we could see that the mill was on the other side; and when we came up to it, we discovered that there was no bridge. The current was running swiftly, and knowing nothing about its depth, we stopped for a few minutes and looked; for we were in a dilemma. Had we the least idea that we would have to pass through a river, we certainly would never have started out with our little load of wheat resting on a couple of loose boards. The ford was some distance below the mill, and there was no one about from whom we might ascertain something about the nature of the river. So we consulted again, after doing the same thing two or three times before, and finally decided to take the risk. We proposed to do it very cautiously, however. So in starting in, we let the oxen take just a step or two,

and them halted them, repeating these tactics till they were going up out of the water, when we had no more need to check them. When in the deepest part the boards just touched the water; but the sacks escaped getting wet.

Finding that we could not get our grist that night, and it being cold in the mill, we went into a store—the only one in the place, and owned by the proprietor of the mill. Here we bought a dime's worth of cheese, and with some of the bread that we had obtained from our new acquaintance of the morning, we sat by the stove and ate a good, hearty supper. We sat there until the store closed, and then we went into the mill and stood around till midnight, when it stopped running, and the miller locked up and went home. We had not the money to go to a hotel, even if such accommodation could be found in the place. But we had noticed a little stack of fodder piled up against a small open shed down where the oxen were standing, amongst the trees by the river. We could think of no other place, so we trotted off down there. Taking our quilts, we found our way to the little shed, and looked about to find some hay or refuse of any kind to make a bed—the moon had come up, and we could begin to see about us—but we could find nothing. So we wrapped ourselves about with a quilt, and squatted down between the shed and the fodder—corn-stalks. What with the cold and our cramped position, this was one of those nights when, speaking about it many times afterwards, we designated as "most miserable."

It may easily be imagined that it was a joyous sound when, before day dawned, we heard a rumbling coming from the direction of the mill. Stopping our breath, we

listened; and sure enough, the miller had turned on the water, and the wheels were already whizzing! We hadn't slept any all night, but it took only a minute to find our way out from what seemed to be about as bad as being in the stocks. And in a little while we had loaded up, and it was not long then when we had crossed the river, not hesitating this time to plunge right in. Of course, we could not make home till the next day, and so let the cattle take their own gait. Traveling slowly, we reached our friend King's place about two o'clock; so we stopped the team, and ran across the prairie just to see them as we passed. When they learned that we had spent a night by the side of a haystack so near to them, we got a real scolding, with strict orders "never to do the like again." Traveling on till we came to the edge of the settlement, and seeing a stack of hay at some distance off from the road, we drove over to it. For we knew that this would be the last chance we would have for a little shelter, and also feed for the oxen. It was yet a little early, and we could have gone some distance further before darkness would overtake us; but a cold wind was blowing, and the stack would afford more comfortable quarters than would the hard, frozen ground on the open prairie, with only a blanket bound about us, and lying there side by side like two Egyptian mummies. In comparison with our experience the night before, we felt that we had nothing to complain of when we crawled out from our bed the next morning.

Our way of doing things when a haystack offered us accommodation—which we were always on the lookout for at such times—was first, to make a bed of hay as close up to the stack as possible—on the lee side, of course—then spread our quilts on the hay, and then again

put a lot more hay on these, and wriggle ourselves down between them, disturbing the hay as little as possible—like a couple of snakes wriggling into their holes, only we went about it in a contrary fashion to that of snakes, going down heels first. We used to lie in this way with all our clothes on, except overcoat, and that we used for a pillow.

After finishing our supper of bread and cheese, our last crumb had vanished; and, as a matter of course, we did not look to have any more till we reached home the next day. But we were not given to worrying over trifles like that, for we had become pretty well accustomed to fasting a good many hours together when away from home. So the next morning we were again trudging along up over the divide, and a little after noon we were close up to the door of the old sod house, with the familiar greetings of welcome floating out from within to meet us. However humble the home, to us there was no place like it; for there could be no home anywhere if the family were not there.

It would be only a little while now before spring would be opening upon us, but we might yet be deceived. However, it would not be prudent to leave anything undone that we could possibly do, so as to be ready at the first warning to commence work. So with this thing and that, and a score of others, we were not driven to the necessity of prying into the nooks and corners and dark places to find something to keep us out of mischief. We were intending to set out a good many young trees and cuttings the coming spring, and were anxious to get about that kind of work and make the place put on something of a homelike appearance. So as soon as the ground had thawed out sufficiently, we made a trip of thirty miles

or more to the Loup River to pull some young trees, and were gone three days.

Edgar was now fifteen years old, and was already taking care of the oxen, and driving them a good deal himself. This gave me a chance to give more time to other things demanding my attention. So as soon as the rains came which we had been waiting for, I went to work setting out the trees. I spent a good deal of time this spring in that way. After all the trees were planted, I made a good many thousand cottonwood cuttings, and planted them on the line around the whole quarter section; but the season was too dry, and only just a few of the five or six thousand made any start to grow. After that we prepared a little piece of ground that we used as a nursery for raising trees from cuttings and from seed, and had good success.

As soon as we had the ground prepared, we sowed our wheat, and had fifteen acres and a half, which yielded between nineteen and twenty bushels to the acre. After this we went on plowing and otherwise preparing ground for corn, etc., planted potatoes, sowed garden seeds, and did other different kinds of work that usually comes along in that season; and in the meantime I planted several thousand trees and helped to build a sod barn for one of our neighbors. So there was no lack of something to do, but we were kept constantly on the move. These once yearling trees have long years since become landmarks in the vicinity of Albion.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Storm and Its Lasting Effects

It was along during the first days in March, when one of the saddest events that we have had to meet came to us. The morning, although not warm, was pleasant enough, with no signs of bad weather near. So after dinner my wife and I walked down the valley to spend an hour or two with the minister and his family. They were living in a sod house a mile and a half away. Along some time in the afternoon clouds appeared in the north, and soon the wind began to stir. We took but little notice of this, however, but the wind kept on gradually getting stronger and colder, and by and by we saw tiny bits of snowflakes drifting past the window, and we began then to think that it was about time we were making a move for home. We had many times long ere this learned how suddenly and unexpectedly a storm was likely to come up and lash itself into fury. And although late in the season as it was, yet there was something about it that very forcibly brought to our minds the fact that the great blizzard of all blizzards of two years before came more than a month later than this even. So we thought it would be folly to disregard the signs, especially after the term of schooling that we had experienced. However strong might be the desire to linger and enjoy the good and appreciable company of our friends, yet we refrained, and were soon laboring on our way up the valley. We were

going northward, and the wind was all the time increasing in velocity and power, the snow coming thicker and faster and beating squarely in our faces. By the time we had gone a little more than half a mile the wind had gathered such force that it almost took away our breath. My wife held firmly on to my arm, and as we were making great effort to reach home as soon as we could, she soon felt herself becoming exhausted. Suddenly her breath became so badly affected that it seemed she would never be able to reach home, but that she would drop and die right there in the road. It was with the hardest labor that she could draw her breath, and as she did so a wheezing, or a kind of whistling came from her chest and throat. She begged me to let her sit down in the road and rest. "For," said she, "I can't go any farther." But I dared not yield to her entreaty, for the wind was gathering force all the time, and there was no telling at all what the storm might become before it was over. Naturally enough, I became greatly alarmed myself, for I had never seen any one in like condition before, and wondered what it could be that caused such extreme distress all so suddenly. We must get home some way, that was evident; and it was only after a large amount of exertion on my part, and very slow travel, that we at last reached the house.

When in fair health she was an excellent walker, and used often to walk down town to church on Sundays, and at other times take the same trip. And in the days which are now long past, before we were married, and after, too, for that matter, we used to take protracted strolls along the broad, green roadways, and the narrow bower-like lanes—blind lanes we used sometimes to call them; perfect lovers'-walks, such as are found nowhere but in Old England; and along the foot-paths winding

through the fields of waving corn—wheat and oats and barley—drinking in the beauties of nature; such scenes as can never be blotted from memory. It was no uncommon thing for us to walk six or seven miles, or even ten sometimes. But this event, this sudden attack of something that we did not understand, changed the whole after life in that respect, and there was for her no more walking any great distance after that.

As soon as we entered the house I placed her upon the bed; but she could not lie down, so I propped her up with pillows in a sitting posture. It seemed that she certainly could not live long in such a distressed condition. She threw back her head, and opened her mouth as wide as possible, her chest and throat heaving and falling, with that peculiar noise as of air with great pressure being forced through a sponge, whilst she gasped for breath. I knew not what to do for her, so I sent one of the boys to get our neighbor, Mrs. Francisco, to come at once. The boy had told her something of the nature of the case, and almost before she entered the door, hearing my wife breathing so hard, she said, "Why, that's asthma Mrs. Turner's got!" Not having any of the remedies our neighbor had suggested, and not knowing what else to do, at the suggestion of the sufferer herself we applied hot flannel bags filled with coarse salt to her chest and throat. This was a standing remedy of my wife's for almost all kinds of chest complaints, and pains, whatever they might be, but it failed to bring relief. Then we tried mustard poultices. We worked along in this way all through the night, and towards morning her breathing became less laborious, and although still breathing hard she seemed to fall into a doze. After this these attacks came so often that she would scarcely be free from one

before she would be suffering again from another. There seemed to be little of the time during her after life, more than twenty years, that it might be said that she was free from this most distressing of complaints. Sometimes we would get medicine from doctors, and sometimes send back East for something that somebody had recommended as a "sure cure;" but these things I myself had little or no faith in, because none of them did any good, but in some cases seemed to do harm. The different things that we resorted to during all these years were so numerous that I could not tell of them. The amount of money paid out for all these almost fruitless remedies each time was not large, perhaps, but it was the increasing outflow that aided in a large measure to keep us from making headway.

Anybody who has never witnessed an extreme case of this disease can have but little idea of its distressing and weakening effects. Many a time when I have been watching at her bedside, when she would be laboring so hard, with mouth opened wide gasping for breath; when the lungs were filling, her head and body would be thrown back in the effort, and again brought forward when the air was being expelled, and it seemed as though the lungs would refuse to act any more, I would often detect myself altogether unconsciously making the greatest effort to assist her in breathing; or to breathe in her stead as it were. As she would be making such extreme effort, I too would find myself making more than ordinary effort to do the same, the sympathy being so strong. But notwithstanding all this pain and suffering and weakness, when she was able to be about and attend somewhat to domestic duties she was always sunny and cheerful, and had such an intensely warm and kindly nature that she was esteemed and loved by all who came in her presence.

She was a very free talker, especially with friends; but for anything pertaining to conventionality or artificial, she had no place. If circumstances should place her between one who might be even more lowly than herself and one more exalted in station, her preference would be first to turn and make friends with the more lowly one, prompted by a spirit of love and pity, and Christian duty —how different from the world generally in that respect! Often, when neighbors and friends would call to see her when sick, if she could talk at all it was hard to check her; in fact, it seemed almost impossible to do so. After the friends had departed, however, she would suffer for what she had done, for she would often be so completely exhausted that a setback would probably be the result. I would say to her sometimes, "By the way you try to talk, if it was not for your distressed look, your friends would not think you are so very ill." But that genial nature of hers seemed to refuse to be curbed, and the gentle admonition, "Now, don't you talk so much, but leave that for your friends to do," would be forgotten when the next caller came.

All work and little or nothing in the way of a change that would afford a little pleasure, we began to think was not altogether of the greatest profit.

I was still superintendent of the Sunday-school, and it had been running nearly two years, and up to this time we had had no change; nothing out of the ordinary course. So I began to wonder if a Sunday-school concert would not be a pleasant and somewhat profitable change to have some evening. So I informed one or two of the older members of my purpose, and it was decided that a concert should be given on the 21st day of March. I was never present at an entertainment of that nature, and

there had been nothing of the kind in the county before, so that I was altogether inexperienced along that line. But I did not wait for somebody to come along to do the work, but at once set about making the necessary arrangements, and to have everything well prepared. I did not do as many superintendents do nowadays; that is, appoint half a dozen or more committees, but made all the arrangements myself. Where so many have part in the matter, it seems less likely to have everything pass off pleasantly and satisfactorily all around. Some want this thing and some that, consequently unpleasantnesses arise, sometimes even in the Sunday-school and the Church. I had written on separate cards the verse or verses and other parts for each one, so that they might carry them on their person, and so be able to commit their parts well to memory. When the time came the little schoolhouse was packed full of eager listeners. It may not be wholly without interest to here give a copy of the program. It is as near a facsimile of the original as is possible to make, and has the peculiarity of being purely of Nebraska prairie origin:

*Programme
of the
Albion Union S. School,
Evening Concert.*

*Will be given in the
School House at
Albion.*

Sunday, March 25th 1875, at 6.30 P.M.

*Rev. C. C. Humphrey, Conductor. — Mr. Boardman Agent.
John Turner, Superintendent.*

Prayer _____ Rev. C. C. Humphrey

- a. The Gathering - (By the School) P. 26. Cl.
b. Sunday School Volunteer Song (The School) P. 146. Cl.

Scripture Recitations.
④ Boys & Girls Class.

1 Joshua Charles - 2 Louis Humphrey - 3 Edgar Turner
4 Charles Hamilton - 5 Willie Hamilton - 6 Edward Hamilton
7 Cora Britts - 12 Carrie Bell - 8 & 9 Carrie Boardman
9 Minnie Boardman - 10 Ruth Charles - 11 Fanny Charles.
13 Adabel Frances.



Dialogue _____ Ruth & Fanny Charles.

SCD
f. My Jesus I Love Thee - (By School) P. y. A. P. G. James

Poetization - Poetry - Longing for rest.
Messrs Elba, Alma & Willie Hamilton.

Eb. Welcome Home - (By Mr. Turner & family and
Mr. Kingham)
1. The Better Land ----- P. 163. Eb.
J. Turner, Ed. Turner, Ernest Turner, David Logan,
Mrs. Turner, Mr. Williamson, Minnie Boardman, Cora
Crites, and Full Chor. chorus.

Poetry ----- By Tammy Charles

Poetry - The Charged Cross - Joshua Charles.
Scripture Recitations
Psalmus XXIII.

1. Francisco. 2. Ernest Turner. 3. Grant Chase. 4. Geo. Boardman.
5. Alvin Humphrey - 6. Grant Crites.

SCD

Our Victory - (By School) P. 2e. Cl.

Sold it up to the World - (By School) P. 2. Leaflets.

Poetry - The time to die - Mrs. Jane Sachse.

Address to School - (Brief) - Rev. S. P. Bollman.

Scripture Recitations - Psalms.

1 Leonard Turner, P. 16. V. 1 - 2 Gen. Sachse, P. 147. V. 12. Ruth Humphrey
P. 145. V. 2 - Agnes Francis, P. 145. V. 9 - Lilly Mattison, P. 146. V. 1.

Reading & Brief Comment - Isaiah, 52. V. 7-9

Rev. C. C. Humphrey

a. Hymn - How Beautiful Upon the Mountains

Mr. Turner & Family & Mr. Kingham

Poetry - By Ruth Charles.

F.H. *Wondrous Love* — (By School) Pg. 11. cl.

Song, and Chorus. — *Where there is no parting*. Pg. 15. cl.
S. Turner — Ed. Turner — Ernest Turner — David Logan
Mrs Turner — Mrs Williamson — Minnie Boardman — Core
Critics. and full choir chorus.



Prayer — — — Rev. J. P. Rollman.



Benediction — Rev. C. C. Humphrey.



It was simply to give to it a more complete appearance that the name of Rev. C. C. Humphrey as conductor, and Mrs. M. P. Boardman as organist, were placed on the program, for, as I have intimated before, all the conducting there was about it was done by myself, even to the selections and parts assigned to the ministers themselves.

The words found in the seventh and ninth verses of the fifty-second chapter of Isaiah, as commented on by the pastor are these:

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem."

These are also the words of the anthem that followed.

As to the organist, there was none; for there was no such a thing as an organ anywhere about, except it might be the little old melodeon that we had down in the grove on the Fourth of July previous; and what had become of that I don't know. The only other thing nearest a musical instrument was an old square piano that Mrs. Boardman had sent to her from the East some time after she arrived.

And that brings to my mind that it was about this time when this same old square piano, after coming all the way from New York, found itself in trouble. It was on Sunday, I remember. We were having very heavy rains, so that the sod houses and dugouts were having a pretty hard time. It had been raining hard all Saturday night and Sunday morning; and in the afternoon Mr. Boardman drove down to our place to get me to go with him

and do something to the piano, "for," said he, "the rain has been pouring through the roof, and the water has got all inside the piano and I'm afraid it's just about ruined." Being Sunday, I hesitated before making up my mind that I would go, for I was scrupulous with regard to such matters, although we were out there on the wild prairie, and Sunday work and I were kept as far apart as possible. "I know," he said, "just about the way you feel about such things, but this is a thing we could n't avoid." Of course, I had had lots of experience myself besides what I had seen of others, that situated as we were in these sod houses, and holes in the ground, as I may term them, it was utterly impossible to prevent such things happening. So I took up my tools and accompanied him; it was raining all the time we were gone.

As soon as we got into the house I took the instrument apart, doing nothing more than was necessary, promising to return in a day or two and do all that might be needed.

But to revert once more to the concert—I might say, that as we were accustomed to having plenty of room on the broad, open prairie on which to roam, we were not inclined to restrict ourselves in many other ways; and whatever may be said about the quality of the work in rendering the program of the first Sunday-school concert, it will be seen, I think, that there was no stint in regard to quantity. However, the same man who made the remark about the banner carried by our Sunday-school on the Fourth of July, that he was not aware that we had an artist in the county, said to me again at the close of the exercises: "I did n't suppose that we had such talent in the county." And I doubt if it ever will be discovered what ability we did possess in those early days out there on those blizzard-swept prairies of Nebraska.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Country Shocked

NOW THAT we were getting more land broken up it seemed impossible to give to it proper care and still go on making additional improvements, and at the same time spend so much time and labor on somebody else's land as we had been doing, on account of not having a team of our own. So after considering the matter for some time, we finally came to the conclusion that it would be to our advantage to buy a yoke of oxen on time, and thus be enabled to do all that we did do on our own place. But the thought of going into debt so heavily was no easy thing to overcome, and that was the reason why we had not done so before. Upon inquiry, I soon learned that an Indian trader and ranchman named Willard had a yoke of cattle to sell. Mr. Willard's ranch was near the Pawnee Agency. So one morning I started out afoot, a distance of nearly thirty miles, and it was night by the time I reached the ranch. After chatting a few minutes with Mr. Willard, I told him what I was looking for, and said he: "Yes, I've a yoke that I can sell you, but they're not here now; Elder Wright has them down at Monroe; but you can go down and look at them, and if they suit you you can bring them back with you. You can have them for one hundred and forty dollars; and I'll give you seven months' time on them, with interest at the rate of twelve per cent per annum." This seemed more than I

dare venture upon. However, the next morning I found myself plodding on down the road, still going eastward several miles beyond the ranch to Monroe. When I arrived there I made known to the elder my errand, and he called to his son in the field to bring the oxen in. I inspected them somewhat, or looked at them it might be better to say, for I did n't even pretend to be a connoisseur in judging of the merits of a yoke of oxen. One of them was a large, fine-looking fellow, with a good-natured face. But the other, so far as I could see, was a pretty old chap, and could make not the least claim to be called handsome. I had heard of no others anywhere about for sale, so I drove them to the ranch. When I got back I asked Mr. Willard if he would not bring down his figures a little, especially as one of them looked as though he had quite recently been let out of the ark. "O no!" said he, "he 's not old; he looks a little old, that 's all! and I could n't think of taking a cent less." But for all that I had my own private opinion about the matter, especially when I could see, not only his long horns sticking away out on each side and curving upward, but also the long gray hairs hanging in fringes all over him. But as there seemed no other way, a note was made for one hundred and forty-seven dollars, which included seven dollars for a neck yoke and chain. It was too late now to start for home, so I staid at the ranch again that night.

The amount of money paid for this outfit before I got clear of it would take considerable time to find out, and could be known only by examining the different notes given from time to time, and figuring out the interest. I know, however, that it was twelve years and a half before the final payment was made.

Now that we were in possession of a team which we

might call our own if nothing more, we went to work with might and main breaking all we possibly could. Besides irregular plots of ground bordering the winding ravine, we broke three or four acres to be used as a garden; also narrow strips around a meadow lot, as we called it, in which we afterwards planted trees and a hedge, and set out little clumps in different parts of the lot to give it a picturesque appearance, and to afford shade for cattle if it should some time be needed. We kept on breaking and making these various improvements right up to the time of harvest, when I went out and worked all through the season.

Our neighbor Cummings and the two Willot brothers had purchased what was called a "heading machine," and, as well as cutting their own grain, they went around cutting for others. These "headers" were quite large affairs, cutting a swath of ten or twelve feet, and were driven by four horses, all abreast, pushing the machine from behind. The grain was stacked loose, and was usually cut about twelve or fifteen inches below the heads; but that, of course, depended on its condition. If it happened to be very ripe and drooping over it was necessary, in order to get all the heads, to cut it quite low. But there being so much straw, all light and fluffy, it was very hard to stack; and I have been almost buried up in it sometimes.

The construction of the machine, in some respects, was similar to the "harvester," or the more modern "self-binder." As the grain was cut it fell back onto a canvas carrier, which carried it along, and was then taken up by another, which elevated it exactly as the straw is carried up on a threshing machine. It then fell into what was called a "barge." The barge was a kind of rack—if

I may so call it—about eight feet wide and sixteen in length, and about four feet high on the back side, with the ends tapering to about twelve or fifteen inches at the front side. It was boarded all round with very thin boards, a space of two or three inches being left between the boards. The barge was placed on the running-gear of a wagon and drawn along by the side of the machine, with the elevator extending up over the barge. One man, with a fork, attended to the grain as it came up, whilst another stood in the front end of the barge and drove the horses.

I went around with these men, helping to do the stacking, for which I received two dollars a day, or rather its equivalent in work, as they cut my grain and also did the threshing. Their charges for cutting and stacking were two dollars an acre, and five cents a bushel for threshing, which made my bill altogether forty-six dollars and forty cents. It was customary for the person for whom they were working, in all work of that kind, to furnish board for the men—in this case eight or nine—and also hay and grain for ten or a dozen horses. The price of wheat was about fifty cents a bushel. Now it may be imagined how small was the balance remaining, if any at all, after deducting all the various expenses by the time the grain was finally delivered in the market—such as plowing the ground, about twenty-five bushels of seed, harrowing the ground once before and twice after the sowing (we sowed by hand), cutting and stacking, threshing, and board for men and feed for horses, and, after all this, hauling the grain to Columbus, a round-trip of a hundred miles, with an ox-team.

These machines would, of course, clean off a large area of ground in a day; but the grain was very liable

to damage, and a good deal of it often spoiled in the stack. If the grain happened to be a little damp or green or weedy it would soon heat and become moldy.

Having got through with another harvest, we went right on with the routine work, doing all kinds of jobs between times. Of course, we had to hire a man with a machine to cut grass for making hay, as in previous years. And as we were getting more land opened up there was much more work to be done, so that I could not cut four or five tons of hay with a scythe, as I had done two years before. And, besides, we needed much more now than at that time.

In those days of long, unpleasant journeys, often more or less accompanied with physical suffering, it will not be difficult to imagine the glad welcome accorded any new enterprise starting up in our midst that would lighten these burdens. And now we were in anxious expectation soon to be enjoying the first of these boons.

Two men, Sackett and Crouch, had come in, and were making preparations to put up a flour mill on the creek a little below town. The miller, Mr. Crouch, came up to our place one day and asked me if I would build them a sod house. "I've been told," he said, "that you are a good hand at that kind of work, and have been recommended to come up and see you." We had before us so much work of our own that I hardly knew what to think about taking the job. But as there was so much that we needed, if we could possibly do so it would be a help to us. So I promised to go down the next day with the team and necessary tools and commence work. After we had finished the job we received no cash for our work, as I had expected, but had to take it in what-

ever way we could get it—a little lumber, and the balance in orders on the little store at different times.

Mr. Sackett first came out at the beginning of the year and located the site for the mill, and then returned home. About six months later Mr. Crouch arrived, and had the lumber and other material brought onto the ground, hauling it from Columbus; and made other preparations. And when his partner came out again, in August, they went to work at once, digging the race and preparing the material for building. They worked all through the winter, and advanced so far with the enterprise as to be able to start the mill running on the sixth day of April following, 1876.

An incident occurred about this time that is all as fresh in my mind to-day as it was on that rather sharp but bright and beautiful morning twenty-six years ago. It was at the dawning of the fourth day of November, when a thrill of horror was sent from one end of the little valley to the other. In fact, the whole surrounding country was soon affected, as the news spread from one settlement to another. For this was the first of anything of that nature that had happened in all the country around.

On the morning referred to we were all sitting at the table eating our breakfast of mush and milk, as usual. Suddenly there came a sharp rap on the door, and on opening it there stood a lad of about seventeen. His demeanor betrayed him and told us almost before he uttered a word that he had some very serious or even dreadful message to deliver. He was pale and out of breath, and greatly excited. His name was "Will"—or that was the name by which he was called—and he lived in the little settlement up the valley more than a mile

and a half away. He could not be persuaded to come into the house as he had always done before, but called me outside. Our surmisings, prompted by his strange conduct, proved to be correct; for he had come to tell us that their neighbor, during the night, had committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor. The man was about forty years old and was the father of the little girl who came so near being killed in that awful thunder-storm about a year and a half before, when the roof of the little sod house in which she was staying with friends, fell in upon them. What the cause could be for committing the dreadful deed I could not tell; but, however much I may regret the statement, it is a fact nevertheless that there were some who were addicted to that habit which claims so many thousands every year as its victims. In the early days, and for some years, there was no liquor saloon in the county, yet it was evident that liquor was obtained somewhere near about. My own little experience one time proved that liquor did find its way into the county. When I first drove that ox-team up from Columbus, with those old trucks, along with that barrel of salt and some other things that I brought along for a man who was making pretensions to keeping a bit of a store in the "hotel" building, as we called it, was a two-gallon earthenware jug from the drug-store. It will be remembered that I had a pretty hard time getting through a ravine. During the ordeal the neck of the jug got broken off, and a little of its contents were spilled; and from the very strong odor I discovered it to be alcohol. I came to know this simply from the fact that in the piano factory and salesrooms in which I held a position in London the "polishers" used it in connection with their work,

polishing the cases of the instruments; and none seemed to know it by any other name than "spirits of wine." Until I came to this country I never heard tell of such a thing as a person drinking it. The men, of course, using it in their work had free access to it and looked upon it rather as a deadly poison than anything to be taken as a beverage. I remember one time I had a little toy engine, and used it to generate steam, and how careful I was not to get any of it on my hands for fear of poison.

But to revert to the narrative. Some time during the night the man got up from his bed, put on his socks and pants, and went out. After waiting a reasonable time and finding that he did not return they began to think that something was amiss. So some of the family got up and went out into the chill air to search for him, but failed to discover any trace of his whereabouts. But as soon as it was light the search was renewed, and this time with the aid of their nearest neighbors. Their alarm at his long absence became more intense, and they began to feel that the worst had happened. They examined every place where they thought it most likely to find him; but failing of their object they took a wider circuit about the place. It was not long before they came upon something that revealed to them the awful tale. Only a few yards back of the house was a cornfield about fifty yards wide. Just a little way from the corner of the house were the first traces of blood, which continued on across the field and a few yards beyond on the prairie to the edge of the ravine. On the edge of this ravine lay the lifeless form of the man, stretched at full length with his face to the ground, his head down the slightly sloping bank. As soon as the discovery was made the boy, "Will," was dispatched to carry the awful news to the neighbors

and the few people in the little town. As soon as the boy had delivered to us the message he hurried on down the road. The man's son, a boy about sixteen years old, had hired out to Mr. Francisco, our near neighbor, and had just hitched the horses to the plow and was about to go to work, when Will came along. Being so excited he hardly knew what he was about, and took no pains to break the news gently, but called to the boy across the field, telling him what a dreadful thing had come to his father. The boy immediately threw down the lines, and, leaving the horses standing there in the field, ran home with all speed to find the news but too true.

Such terrible news coming all so suddenly was a severe shock to us, and without a moment's delay Edgar and I ran as fast as we could all the way till we came to the house. We found no one there, the woman and the little children had all gone over to their nearest neighbor's. We had learned something of where the body lay, however, and as soon as we found the first traces of the blood-stained trail we had no need of any further guide. Whether the man had any such thoughts about him during those awful moments or not, of course, there is no knowing, and to account for it is only a surmising of my own; but the thought forced itself upon me that this blood-stained trail may possibly have been made in order to leave some clue to the whereabouts of his body. Had this not been the case, there is no telling how prolonged the search may have been; for the spot where he lay was one of the last where a person would think to go in such an event. We found him, as I have stated, lying on his face; and as well as having on his socks and pants he had on a little skullcap. He went out without shoes. The dreadful deed had evidently been done with the right

hand; for about ten or fifteen feet to the right lay the razor, which, after making the last attempt, had been flung to one side. Although such a large quantity of blood had left its mark all the way along, yet there was a good deal more under his head where he lay, and it had trickled some way down the bank. The boy had followed us up closely, and as we stood there looking he came up, and it was a heart-aching scene to behold him as he looked down upon his dead father.

It was only a little while when several men came, and after short consultation the body was carried over to the house. There being nothing about the place convenient on which to carry the corpse we took off the door from the stable which only a year before I had built, and carried it on that. The coroner, a man named Job Green, had been notified by the boy Will, and arrived soon after we got the corpse over. After washing the ghastly wound in the throat it was seen that three separate gashes had been made, one of them almost severing the windpipe, which showed how determined had been the purpose to do the work effectually.

A jury was impaneled consisting of men who were present. The case was so plain that long deliberation was not needed after the examination of two or three witnesses, and the jury soon agreed on finding a verdict to the effect that the deceased came to his death by his own hand. The shock coming all so suddenly was a terrible one for the poor wife and children, and to realize, especially under such dreadful circumstances, that she was left a widow, and one boy and four little girls at one stroke made fatherless.

This was the first death that had occurred anywhere in the neighborhood, except an old woman named Curry;

and there being no cemetery or burying-ground, she was buried on her claim. A settler who had a homestead half a mile southwest of town in some way came in possession of a quarter section cornering his claim, and held it as a timber claim. The land was first filed on by a young man named George Harrison; and I remember that it was the common talk among the settlers that the man through some crookedness (to use the exact expression) "got the land away from him." There was a ridge on the land that he thought would be of little or no use for agricultural purposes; so the idea of making a portion of it into a burying ground struck him as something that would pay. For he was generally after money wherever it could be found; whether in a live or dead man, it did n't make any difference. The ground was never platted, however, but being the prospective cemetery, here on the top of this ridge the suicide found his last and lonely resting-place. The following year the land was broken up and a crop raised on it. Some time later the present cemetery on the hill south of the town was surveyed and platted, and the boy, Nathan, with a friend went up to find the grave of his father and to move the body to the new burying-ground; but their efforts were fruitless, as nothing could be found to indicate the spot. So, as I have said, it was indeed a lonely resting-place.

The night before the funeral Edgar, who was now nearly sixteen years old, another boy about the same age, and a man who was a near neighbor to the deceased, all went to the house to watch the corpse through the night. The terrifying experiences of that watch were such as the boys never forgot. And I doubt if ever the one who was the cause of it forgot it, either. It is an unpleasant task to speak of it here in these pages, and it is with re-

luctance that I do so. And were it not for an event very similar in its nature and related to this same person, that occurred less than two years later, it is likely that I would refrain from giving it mention at all.

It will not be denied, I think, that there are persons, not a few, who are thought to be strong of nerve and of great courage, and yet, in the presence of death, especially in the silent hours of midnight, find it hard and simply impossible to resist a feeling of awe creeping over them. Whatever may have been the nerve and courage the two boys possessed, being in the midst of a hundred dead bodies in the blackest night would not have horrified them as did the inhuman conduct of their fellow-watcher. He and the one who was lying there before him, stiff and cold, and white and motionless as a block of marble, had been intimate friends and acquaintances; they two, with a third, had all come from Wisconsin together. Knowing the man so well as I did I can not help thinking that the strange enactment on his part he had, as it were, forced himself to perform for the purpose of disguising and hiding away from the boys some horrible fear or dread existing within himself. It was evident that he had already taken somewhat freely of liquor of some kind, and had also in his possession a little bottle, which from time to time he took from his pocket and sipped. And as he stood there by the side of the corpse he would slap the face with his hands, first one cold cheek and then on the other, and exclaim:

"How do you feel now, old pal? Would n't you like to take a drink?" at the same time offering the bottle, and then again putting it to his own lips. "Why do n't you wake up and tell us all about it, old chap?" he went on again, and using other similar dreadful expressions. The

boys were so completely shocked and horrified that they almost trembled for fear the Almighty should manifest his wrath at the awful drama that was being enacted, and bring down upon that house something more terrible than that which they were then being compelled to witness. It will, I think, be easily imagined the great relief that came to the boys when, after a time, the man sat down and soon dropped into a deep sleep; and they, doubtless, prayed within themselves that he might slumber on till the morning light should break upon them and bring still further relief.

When Edgar came home the next morning he said he hoped that he would never again in his life be called upon to experience another such a night as the one he had just passed. I never heard a word about that night's experience from any others than the two boys, and I presume they kept it all pretty close to themselves.

There is much that might be said along this line and in connection with this whole matter, but to me it is an unpleasant theme to dwell upon; and although subsequent events, if we ever reach them, will compel the mind to wander back again to this awful scene, we will leave it for the present.

CHAPTER XXIX

A Desperate Encounter

BUILDING the sod house for the mill folks had put us behind with our own work at home; and although it was so late in the season we had the heaviest job of sod-building on our hands this fall that we had yet undertaken. The old sod house in which we had been keeping the cattle was getting in very bad condition, and very unsafe, so we made up our minds to build a new sod stable. It was to be twenty-five feet wide and fifty-six in length. It was a little risky to undertake such an extensive job so late in the season, with no other help than our own; and especially as a large amount of timber would be needed, and as yet we had nothing prepared. It was away into November by the time we had the walls built up. The nights were quite cold, and fearing lest frost should come and put a stop to our hauling the sod, we worked like beavers from daylight till dark. For when we made up our minds to do a certain thing it would be no mere trifle that could turn us from our purpose. As soon as we had raised the walls we lost not a moment in getting poles for the roof, mangers, etc. Many of the settlers had again been getting wood from the Pawnee Reservation, though perhaps often coming in rather unpleasant conflict with the Indians. So we thought, as we were pushed so closely for time, that we would take the risk and go there too. We packed up some food, consisting of bread, a little butter, and some salt pork or

bacon. Our meat was already cooked; for, not like most of the men when on the road or in the timber, we never carried along coffee, tea, uncooked meat, etc., and stopped to build fires and cook, as did some.

Piling all the hay we possibly could on the trucks, we started out. It was on a Monday morning, and we were away all the week, returning with a load the following Saturday. We had to go at least twenty-five miles before finding anything that would suit us. It was getting along pretty well toward night when we unhitched the cattle, but we went right to work chopping as long as we could see. After taking a cold supper from our "grub box" we spread a little of the hay on the ground, and rolling ourselves up in our blankets like a chrysalis we dropped down upon it. Although the weather was somewhat pleasant during the day, the nights were cold, and when we uncoiled ourselves from our cocoonery in the morning everything was coated with a thick, rimy frost. At the peep o' day the sound of the ax was ringing and echoing in and out the gulches, but for all that it was getting well on toward noon before we had the poles loaded on the wagon, and we were eating our breakfast and dinner at the same time.

It was already dusk when we came up to a house on top of the bluffs just before descending into the Beaver Valley. Here we threw off our load and went to one of the haystacks and made our bed that night pretty close up to that. The next morning we drove back again and staid that night in the timber. And so we continued through the week, spending the night wherever we happened to be. We reached the house with the last load Friday night, and started for home the next morning. After the first night spent by the side of the haystack,

whenever we were there again we staid in the house; for the people said if they had known what we were intending to do they would have had us come into the house that night.

It was always the case when we were away from home, and accidentally, as we might say, fell in with people in this way that we were treated with the greatest kindness; and the last words on parting would be: "Now do n't forget to come and see us some time, and bring your wife and children along." This was one of the characteristics that stood out so prominently with the people, especially in the newer settlements.

We got quite an early start that morning, for, being Saturday, we were anxious to reach home in good season, as there would be a great deal extra to do to prepare for Sunday. As we were moving along up the valley the sky gradually became full of haze, giving it the appearance of what is called "Indian summer." But that phenomenon, we knew, had already passed. The wind was blowing quite hard from the north, and we could not think what it could be, unless it was smoke from a prairie-fire a long distance off. As we kept getting nearer home the air became thicker; but when we reached the house about eleven o'clock we could see no signs of fire up the little valley. So we contented ourselves with the thought that if there should be a fire it must be so far away that there could be no immediate danger. We had been away all the week working hard and had had anything else than a luxurious time, and were not feeling in prime condition to go fighting a prairie-fire, even if one had been in sight. Not having taken anything to eat before starting out we were now beginning to feel pretty hungry. So as soon as we had attended to the oxen we went directly to the

house, and at once sat down to eat some bread and milk. And by the way we were making it disappear an observer would have concluded that we were enjoying the change of diet immensely. The wind, which had been increasing in velocity all the morning, had now worked itself into a perfect gale, and we had been sitting at the table but a few minutes, when we heard a tremendous roaring, such a peculiar sound it seemed to me. Getting up from the table I went to the front door to see what it might be, but with little thought about a fire even then, on account of the strangeness of the noise. And, of course, thinking that if a fire had been near, we surely would have seen it some time before. Just now Ernest and Leonard, who were out at the back of the house, seeing the fire coming, came rushing in, exclaiming: "O father, there's a fire coming!" As I put my head out of the door and looked toward the north, from whence the noise came, who can imagine my bewilderment when I caught sight of that head-fire, full of destruction in its fury, sweeping down over the brow of the hill about three hundred yards away. The road ran north and south only a few yards in front of the house, and the fire was rushing down on the opposite side. As I may have stated before, the roads, as we called them, were simply a track where the horses walked, a ridge of grass growing up all along in the middle, so that they could not be depended on as a guard against fire. About two hundred yards down the road was the ravine where we had once been drowned out. Down in this ravine—there were two of them in fact, running parallel and very near together, only a narrow ridge between—were lots of tall, dead, and dried-up grass and weeds. So it seemed almost impossible to prevent the fire from crossing the track and spreading all over the claim, de-

stroying all the young timber in the ravines and everything else that lay in its course. Further up the valley the fire was on our side of the road, but had been checked by some breaking of several acres in extent, around which it would take the fire a little time to work its way. As soon as it reached the end of the breaking, however, it would again be free, and another head-fire would break away in all its fury and sweep down the valley in terrible haste. For the "big ravine," as we called it, full of tall grass and weeds, ran zigzag all the way down the valley. Nothing could stay its onward rush till it came in contact with the fire-guard on the north line of our land. And just here, where the line crossed the ravine, was one of two bad places that took considerable time every year trying to fix them so as to keep the fires from crossing. Consequently a fire sweeping down the valley in such a rage would be certain to leap the guard unless several persons should be there to set a back-fire; and even then there was great risk.

There was not a moment to think what to do, but something must be done to save ourselves. So I called to the boys to get anything they could lay their hands on and go to the place on the north line just referred to and watch there closely. Not having a moment myself to hunt for something, I snatched up a broom that stood in one corner of the room, and bare-headed, like a "scare-crow," rushed out of the house and with all my might ran a race with that awful head-fire that was stretching out its long, quivering tongues, eager to gather in and devour everything that came within its reach. The fire was nearly opposite the house when I started out at the door, and I managed to win the race by a few seconds only. As I was running along down the road I turned my head to

look at the fire that seemed to be chasing me for my very life; I saw my wife coming on some distance behind. What she imagined that she could do I don't know; for she was pale and trembling with fear. But I was not free from harm, she well knew, and her object was to be near by in the event of something happening. As soon as I got into the bottom of the ravine I began beating away with my broom, breaking down the tall, dry sunflowers, and tramping them flat to the ground. I had only a moment to work, however, before I heard the roar and saw the flames as they came leaping down over the edge of the ravine. Taking my wife hurriedly by the hand I led her off a little distance to a place I thought the most secure from danger. The fire had already made its way into the thick, tall bluejoint on the sloping bank, the angry flames mounting fifteen or twenty feet into the air. Not content with devouring everything as they came up to it, great long tongues of flame, detaching themselves, leaped forward, eager to perform their deadly work the more speedily. I had moved my wife only fifteen or twenty yards away, but before I could get back to my post the fire had worked its way into the bottom of the ravine, into the thick mass of tall grass and weeds; and the roar and crackling was almost like a fusilade of musketry. I tried to get near to beat out the fire along the edge of the road but was compelled to fall back on account of the great heat, as the flames reached out and seemed eager to draw me into their embrace. The danger at this point had now passed, and the wild fire and I were each doing our best to see which should be the first to get over the ridge and into the bottom of the next ravine. But the fire, having a few yards the start, beat me a trifle in the race; and the heat being so intense

and the flames darting out hither and thither, in my attempt to prevent it from crossing the road my face and hands were scorched and hair singed, and I was driven back again and again. As the big, tall sunflowers and bloodweeds—horseweeds we sometimes called them, on account of horses having such a liking for them—twelve to fifteen feet high, burned at the bottom and fell, stretching themselves across the narrow roadway, they carried the fire with them, and the fire fiend had accomplished that which I had been trying so hard to prevent, and was now on our side of the road. We had planted three or four rows of corn on the line or fire-guard, which was only a rod wide. But we had kept this tolerably clean, and by rushing in and taking two or three rapid strokes with the broom, and then falling back, I succeeded in keeping it from getting into the grass inside the line. As soon as the fire on the other side of the road had got up out of the ravine it was checked and driven eastward around a piece of plowed land. It was only a few minutes making its way along the end of the field, when another head-fire started out like a ball from the mouth of a cannon. Away it went in its reckless career, licking up numerous hay-stacks and all else that came in its course; and crossing the north side of Beaver Valley it struck the creek a mile away. The wind was blowing such a gale that the creek proved no barrier to its onward rush, and on it sped, leaping the creek as a horse with its rider would leap a brook in a neck-or-nothing kind of way in a steeple-chase. On it went, consuming numerous other stacks of hay and doing considerable other damage. Crossing the valley on the other side of the creek, it moved on up over the hills onto the divide. Still pursuing its course it crossed Plum Creek, in which little valley our present

Governor Poynter afterwards settled, and whose home is still there; and on it went down into the Cedar Valley, being checked only in its progress when it struck the river miles away to the south.

The fire came upon us so suddenly that our neighbor Francisco knew nothing about it till the family saw it from the little window as they sat eating their dinner, when they rushed out and worked hard to save their hay and other stuff about the place.

Feeling now to be secure on this side, I ran on with all speed to where the boys were, my wife coming on slowly after me. The fire on this side was now only about a hundred yards away and was sweeping furiously down upon us. I knew that with a fire bearing down upon us with such awful speed there was no possibility of saving ourselves except by running a back-fire all along the line. Directly between us and the fire stood one of the neighbor's stacks of hay only a little distance away, and he was away from home. Knowing well what the inevitable result would be if we did not fire pretty soon, nevertheless I hesitated. With only the boys and myself, we could hardly have run a fire along the line for that distance and allow it time to work back a little before the head-fire would strike it. But just as we were about to start the fire, a dozen or more men who had seen the fire bound across the creek and then sweep over the valley on the other side came in hot haste to our rescue. Some came on horseback, some came afoot, and others drove up helter-skelter with a team and wagon with what little there was left of a barrel of water. Each was armed with a weapon of some kind. It was only a few moments before we were all strung along the line, some with flaming torches of old grass, shouting one to another and run-

ning along as fast as they could, firing as they went; whilst others kept a strict watch all along the line. We had barely got a continuous line of fire, which had burned back only a few feet, when the head-fire, like a frightened steed, leaped forward, and those directly in line fell back and fled to get away from the intense heat and stifling smoke. Some dropped flat with their faces to the ground to allow the dense clouds of smoke to pass over. In a few minutes the strong gale had driven away the smoke and we could see the fire spreading on either side across the little valley. We felt greatly relieved now and thought that we were secure from harm, for this time at least. And after standing and looking for a few minutes, and thinking what might have been, we turned to go to the house. We had gone only a few paces, when, looking back, we saw, only a few yards behind us, a little fire, no bigger than the top of the waterpail that we carried, blazing up in the grass where we had been standing. Of course, we were all around that little spot in a trice; and bang! went one wet sack, and bang! went another. But all the pounding in the world, it seemed, would have no effect with such a hurricane as was then raging. For it had taken the fire in its strong talons and was bearing it away on swift wing, in spite of all our protestations and wet-sack arguments to the contrary. The grass here had been mown and cleared off, except around the edge, and here it was that we had stacked our wheat; and having done the threshing, the stack of straw was still there, and this we wanted to save, if possible. Knowing that it would be vain to think of putting out the fire, we tried our best to steer it away from the straw, but it shot ahead on the smoothly mown surface, and in a moment the stack was all ablaze. There being now no possibility of saving the

stack we directed all our efforts to keeping it out of the ravine and burning up the young trees which were now growing up thickly all the way along and, in places, had become quite a jungle. We fought desperately, and succeeded in keeping it out of the ravine for a distance of about seventy rods, when it struck a bend in the ravine, and we then lost all control. It struck across the ravine and into one corner of the meadow, where a little while before I had succeeded in keeping it out on the upper side by the road. Right here we had some of the hardest and most exhausting fighting of fires that I was ever engaged in. The grass was tall and heavy, and weeds and brush of various kinds stood so thick as to be almost one mass. We were by this time near to the south line, and some of the men being exhausted, and thinking they could be of little more service, had left; but the boys and I still fought on until the fire had run clear off the place. The heat in this mass of stuff was so intense, and we fought so desperately hard, that we almost dropped to the ground from exhaustion. The fire ran on down till it came to obstructions or breaks of some kind, but kept on spreading westward and all around and burned over miles and miles of prairie.

With faces and hands scorched and blistered and all begrimed, thoroughly worn out with the day's exploits, we left the scene and turned our faces homeward. When we reached the house my wife was there; but she had not been there long, for all through that exciting and perilous ordeal, although not always in sight, she was somewhere not very far away, keeping a close watch on all our movements. Only a few eventful days such as I have been trying in a simple way to describe, is sufficient for any pioneer to think of and talk about for a lifetime.

CHAPTER XXX

Christmas Time on the Frontier

THE coming day being Sunday we welcomed it gladly, for on account of the hard work and exposure during the week, and the excitement and still harder work of the day just drawing to a close, the physical nature had been put to a severe strain, and we needed rest. But we were always glad when Sunday came, when all unnecessary labor was put aside, so that the body might recuperate and gather strength for the arduous labors of the coming week, and also that the spiritual needs might be satisfied.

When Monday came we began to haul the rest of the poles, and by starting early we were able to get back with a load that night; and so we continued till we had hauled them all home.

Having the walls built up before going to the timber, we had now only the roof to put on, put in the mangers, etc. But instead of a dirt roof we put on old hay and straw. But it was always a bother, as such roofs always proved to be. And do whatever we would—tie it down with wire, or weight it down with poles, it seemed impossible, when the strong winds came, to keep it from blowing off. The rain also soon rotted the straw, and in a few years had so penetrated the walls that they began to crumble and fall away, and the whole thing becoming unsafe we abandoned it.

For the want of being able to afford something better,

the settlers would sometimes build sheds of poles and cover the roof and sides with straw, old hay, or anything of that kind. Sometimes a stack of grain was built close up to a skeleton shed, and when threshed the straw was carried onto the roof and around the sides. But it was almost a constant work to fix up this kind of shelter. The winds came with such violence that in spite of all we could do the straw was swept away and scattered over the ground many rods all around. Many a time I have been out for hours together in intense cold and blinding snow, with the wind blowing almost a hurricane, banking up a shed of this kind, in order that the few cattle might not suffer beyond anything that it was possible to avoid.

Every moment of time possessed its own value, and our constant endeavor was to make the best possible use of them as they sped along. Leonard, who at this time was between nine and ten years old, was herd boy, the rest of us being engaged in other work; but on Sundays we each took turns watching the cattle. During the spring and summer, so as not to be deprived of attending Sabbath-school and Church, he whose turn it might be would rise quite early and take the cattle out to graze till about nine o'clock, when he would bring them in and prepare for Church. Extra provision was always made the evening before so that the work on Sunday might be as light as possible; that the day might be one of rest and spiritual uplifting. As soon as we returned from Church the boys would change their clothes, and then let out the cattle and drive them over the hills more than a mile away to the creek to water. When out with the cattle they usually carried along some good paper or book to read. With the aid of a lady in the East, a stranger, who was interested

in the work of Sunday-schools, I had secured the gift of a small library of twenty-five or thirty volumes for the use of the Sunday-school; and these the boys would take out and read, and so that all might share alike—the time for being out alternating—there was a constant change going on. In the winter time we kept the cattle up and fed them, taking them out only when driven to the creek to water. This was disagreeable and hard work very often, as sometimes it would be blowing and snowing so hard that not only did we have to wade through the deep snow on the level prairie, but it drifted into the big ravines that we had to cross. The cattle would sink into it so deep that it was often with difficulty that they extricated themselves. We, too, as we followed on behind, and until they had beaten down a trail, had a hard time crossing the ravines, often sinking into the snow up to our thighs. Usually two of us went together, but sometimes three, as we had to chop deep holes in the ice with an ax. Whilst we were doing this the cattle needed watching, for they would get uneasy standing around shivering in the cold, and wander off. Chopping holes in the ice was no easy job, for although a swift running stream, and from two to four feet deep, in severe weather it would freeze almost solid. The cattle would sip a little and then look around, and then sip again, and twist their jaws and make the queerest of wry faces you ever saw. And who could wonder at it? If drinking water in the solid as we might almost say, whilst shivering in an atmosphere of thirty-six degrees below zero, would not make an animal put on a long face, then I don't know what would. They had my sympathy, however; but I suppose they found no relief in that. But as soon as ever it seemed possible to change that state of affairs, we lost no time in doing it.

The different improvements needing to be made were all the time crowding one upon another, so that many things had to be left for some future time. There was not sufficient water in the well for half the number of cattle that we now had, though they were so few; for it had caved away six or seven feet up from the bottom so badly that it was unsafe to attempt to dig it deeper. I had let Edgar down into it two or three times, and he had cleaned it out as well as he could. It was a risky thing to do though, for there was plenty of room for him to stand up anywhere under the walls and be clear out of sight from above. After a time a new well became so greatly needed that we concluded, that if any new work must be left undone, it must be something other than a well.

Having had nothing to claim our special attention since the Sunday-school concert nine months before, and Christmas being so near, we were planning to have a Sunday-school entertainment, with a Christmas-tree. As may be supposed, being a frontier affair and the first of the kind, there was nothing elaborate about it. There being no cedar nor pine or evergreens of any kind in the country, we had to be content with a box-elder or ash or something of that kind that we could get down on the creek. Its nakedness, however, was compensated for somewhat by decking it with narrow strips of colored tissue paper and long strings of popcorn. And when the few presents were hung upon it, what with one thing and another the bare limbs were pretty well hidden out of sight, and for a pioneer Christmas-tree it did n't look so bad after all. And it seemed to answer the purpose just about as well as a stately cedar or hemlock would have

done. A program had been prepared, consisting of singing, with recitations, etc., in which several took part. After that the presents were taken from the tree and distributed. We were too poor as a school to make presents to the children, for it was about all that we could do, even with aid received from the Congregational Sunday-school Society, to supply ourselves with a few lesson helps, so that what presents were made were given by parents and friends. I remember that we took down a live turkey as a present for the minister. Of course, we couldn't very well string a live turkey up by his head or his legs upon the limbs of the tree, for if we had even attempted to do that there would most likely have been a great commotion all at once, and a serious disarrangement of the program. So to avoid anything of that nature, I made a wooden box just large enough to put the noble-looking fellow in. Cutting a small hole in the top of the box, I fixed a little sliding lid over it, which was to be used when the proper time came. As the presents were taken from the tree and found their way to each recipient in different parts of the room, there soon arose a perfect hubbub of delight amongst the children, and which to restrain there seemed not the least desire on the part of any. But when the minister's name was called quiet reigned supreme all over the house in a moment; necks were craned and all eyes turned eagerly towards the platform, wondering and anxious to see what kind of a present the minister was going to get, for it was known only to one or two besides ourselves. As the mysterious box containing the unprepared, main portion of the parson's Christmas dinner was being handed to him, with a quick motion the little sliding lid was pushed back, and quick

as a flash up popped the head of that famous turkey. The environment was altogether so different and so strange to what he had been used to, at that time of night especially, that he seemed all bewildered; and stretching up his long neck to its full height, screamed out, "Gobble! Gobble! Gobble!" The minister being taken with so great and sudden surprise at meeting with his new acquaintance came very near letting his "Christmas box" fall to the floor in his excitement. At this the uproar, which had subsided for a few moments, now burst forth with increased power, and the clapping of hands and laughter for a few minutes filled the room. Nor was it this time confined to the children alone, but the older folks did their full share of this part of the program; and for once in their lives, if never before, they seemed to be enjoying a thoroughly "good time." The children who were fortunate enough to receive presents were highly delighted. And those who were less fortunate than they seemed none the less to enjoy the good time. It may be safely presumed that the parents and friends of those who were not favored with presents, would have found pleasure and delight in making their love and friendship manifest by a small Christmas gift. But the children as well as parents realized pretty clearly that it was the circumstances in which they were placed that forbade and made the gratification of that desire impossible.

Our youngest boy, Leonard, spoke a piece entitled "Santa Claus," and for the admirable way it was rendered, Mr. John Peters, who was then county clerk, presented him a very nice picture book called "Little Folks." The book has always been highly prized by Leonard, and the greatest care has been bestowed upon it. And thus was brought to a close the first Sunday-school Christmas

entertainment out there on the prairies of Boone County, Nebraska.

Although we have ever tried, so far as we have understood its meaning, to exemplify true Americanism in the best sense of the term, yet there are some of the old English customs, and those relating to family gatherings in particular, at such a time as Christmas, which we have had no inclination to abandon. Those under our own roof formed but a small circle or gathering. Certainly we had other family connections, but they were thousands of miles away in foreign lands; some in England, some in Australia, and some—if alive—in New Zealand;* one in South Africa; one brother had died in East India. Our family connections then, being so widely scattered over different parts of the earth's surface, a reunion of course was impossible, so we did the next nearest thing to it. In a newly-settled country as we were, everybody knew everybody else in the country all around, still we had not as yet what are called intimate friends. That is a condition brought about by a slower process with English people than with Americans. A few years later, however, others came in, and a close acquaintance sprang up. One of these more especially may be mentioned, a young man named Sabine. This, I think, may be accounted for in more ways than one. In the first place, Mr. Sabine was an Englishman; and in the second place, he came from London. And still further, and which went a long way

*The little boy of eight years who left father and mother and home and sailed from England with uncle and aunt and cousins bound for New Zealand, and heard from only once or twice at first, after forty years of inquiry and search, the author has, in a strange way, quite recently discovered in an asylum, now a man fifty years old. He does not remember, and can give no account of those with whom he sailed from England.

with us as a family towards establishing an intimacy, he was a good singer and had a fine tenor voice, and also possessed considerable literary knowledge. When a boy he used to sing in the choir at St. Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey, I have forgotten which. Of course, it was only natural that we should soon get to talking of scenes and old associations in London; and during the years that we lived together in the neighborhood we spent many pleasant and happy hours chatting and singing in the old sod house. Hard as the times might be, and though the roast beef failed to make its appearance, the historic "Old English plum pudding" never failed at Christmas. The ingredients composing it were not so rich nor so abundant as in other days, and was made up in great part by the name it bore, but somehow the purpose seemed to be served just about as well. A couple of baked chickens served in place of the "roast beef"—they call it roast in this country, but calling it by that name by no means supplies the delicious flavor that is lacking. Our custom was, on these occasions, to have our friends come in and enjoy Christmas with us; and these were pleasant times that we spent together. The old sod house with its mud-plastered walls and hay and dirt roof, low and almost flat, was not altogether adapted to aid the voice in producing the finest effects; but for all that we were not discouraged, and the varying tones of many an old English hymn and song went beating hard up against those rude poles and brush-wood, and buried themselves in the matted hay and dirt above. This custom we kept up for several years, when our friend, desiring a more congenial climate, in the winter time at least, sold his place and bought land in Tennessee, and moved away.

“The winds their plaint are sighing,
Around the old year dying;
And the dead leaves thickly lying,
Form a pillow and a bier!

Hark, how the winds are trembling,
The moans of grief resembling
Of kindred, when assembling
To weep when death is near!

The snow enwraps the mountain,
And buries all the vale;
The frost has bound the fountain,
And the skies weep tears of hail:

For the old year is dying,
The winds their plaint are sighing,
And the dead leaves thickly lying,
Form a pillow and a bier!”

CHAPTER XXXI

This and That

ALTHOUGH pleasant and enjoyable times like those related in the last chapter came to us, or we went to them, it was only at intervals, and they did not stay with us long at a time. It seemed destined that my wife should not get clear of another winter without another attack such as that experienced less than a year before. Winter was coming near a close, and I had gone on a journey; Edgar did not accompany me this time. The two oldest boys had gone down to the ravine to find a little wood, and while they were gone all of a sudden a strong wind and snow storm came up, and it changed much colder. Their mother, as was natural, became much alarmed about their safety, and stationed herself at the window and watched intently and with extreme impatience for their coming. The wind was getting stronger and the storm growing worse as the minutes passed; but no signs of the boys coming! The snow was not so thick but that she could see quite a little distance off. They had gone across the prairie—the meadow as we called it—and into the ravine, more than a quarter of a mile away. Looking straight over the spot where the hole in the bank still remained to mark the place where that memorable drown-out took place nearly four years before, she could see dimly through the swiftly-flying snow into the meadow. With straining eyes and her face pressing the window-

pane intently she watched, anxious to catch a glimpse of them as they might cross the meadow and come into the road. She waited and waited, but still no signs of their coming! It was a great risk, especially for one like herself, but patience had gone to its extreme limit, and the suspense could no longer be borne. So wrapping herself about with a shawl, and leaving the youngest boy alone in the house, she ventured out into the fierce elements to search for them. Following the road till she came to the meadow she crossed over to the ravine, on the edge of which she followed in its winding clear to the south line. Stopping at short intervals to listen and to catch any sound coming from them, she called as loudly as she could; but no answer came back to repeated calling. Suspecting that some ill had befallen them, she became intensely alarmed and affrighted. The great excitement, together with battling against the storm, had already begun to work its ill effects upon her. But our neighbor's house stood across the meadow close by the side of the road about six hundred yards away; and exhausted as she was, she felt that she must go there and tell them about the boys, and they perhaps would go out and search for them. When she came up to the house, the people, of course, were amazed at seeing her away from home and alone in such a storm. They in a moment, however, bethought themselves; the boys were there, and they knew at once whom she was seeking.

When the storm got so bad the boys had hastened to the neighbor's house for shelter and warmth. The people seeing her distressed condition tried to persuade her to stay a while at least. But she no doubt had in mind the little one left alone in the house, and seeing now that the boys were safe could not be persuaded, but started to

go home without a moment's lingering. The storm was now full in her face, and had no one been aware of her condition or where she was, there is little doubt she would have dropped and perished there in the road. Another neighbor, a man who lived next above our place, coming up from town when the storm came on, he too had gone in where the boys were for shelter, and was there when their mother called. After she had left the house and turned into the road, the people could see her and watched her for a few moments in her desperate efforts to make headway against the storm. Having now to face the wind, she became much worse. She had gone only a few yards when her shawl was torn from her grasp, and the wind lashed and flapped it so wildly that all efforts to wrap it about her failed. Realizing now her utter helplessness and the seriousness of the situation, our neighbor rushed out of the house and went to her assistance. Wrapping the shawl about her as best he could, he then assisted her home. He managed to get her only a little way when she became so bad that she could scarcely breathe, and it was with great difficulty and hard work that he succeeded in getting her to the house. She begged frequently that he would let her sit down right there in the road and rest. He knew, however, that he dared not yield to her pleadings; so he persisted in his efforts, and at last, almost entirely by his own strength and exertion, got her to the house. On my arrival home I found her in a prostrate condition, and suffering most acutely from that awfully distressing asthma, which seemed now to have established itself permanently. She was brought low and weak, and each succeeding attack seemed to stay with her longer than the one preceding, and to come more frequently.

I have tried many times to show her what folly it

was, in most instances at least, to worry so much about our safety when out of her sight, and she would say, "Yes, I know God can take care of you, and I know I ought not to do it, but I can't help it!" So intensely spiritual as she was, and trying always, as was plainly evident to all, to trust in her God, yet this almost constant fear when any of us were away, that some ill might befall us, it seemed she could not overcome. Her frail health and weak condition, doubtless, had a tendency to make her as she was, and I am sure it was as she said, that she could not help it.

We have bidden adieu to the old year, 1875; made up largely of hardships to bear, obstacles to surmount, and difficulties to overcome; but not altogether without a speck here and there, in this place and that, of the brighter and more pleasant phases of life, which, if they did not always present themselves in the natural order of events, fortunately we possessed the happy faculty of inventing. In the absence of the real, something artificial would not infrequently be made to serve its place. We enter now, in many respects, upon one of the hardest, and certainly one of the most eventful years yet spent on the old home-stead. The rest of the winter was occupied in the accustomed way; in the performance of various kinds of labor, for which there was never any lack, but always something that must be left for some other day. So at the first indications of the breaking away of winter we at once set about making preparations to meet the fast approaching spring. The first thing along this line usually would be to cut down and clear away cornstalks. Until cornstalk cutters were invented and brought into general use we used to chop them down with a sharp hoe, but sometimes an ax or a spade was used. They were then gathered up

by hand, as we ourselves have done many times, or were raked up with some rude contrivance of the settler's own invention and manufacture, and burned. There were times when scarcely any of the corn would be gathered before a heavy fall of snow came, covering up everything several inches deep, and would lie all the winter perhaps, and so prevent anything more being done till it went off at the opening of spring. This, however, applies more to later years; for with the small amount of land opened up, and the yearly visits of our old acquaintances, the grasshoppers and other adverse causes, we had no need of worrying very much about cornhusking.

After the dreary months of winter, when cold, snow, and blizzard were over, it can hardly be imagined the right glad welcome with which the first signs of returning spring were greeted. It was one of the greatest delights to see for the first time the yellow-breasted meadow-lark in the early morning perched on the top of a post, or on the extreme tip of the topmost branch of a tree—the first to herald the glad news that a more genial and pleasant atmosphere was already winging its way toward us, and that we should soon feel its soft and balmy touch. Not much of a song to be sure, in which scarcely half the notes in the gamut were employed, was that which the little bird sang as it swayed to and fro on the little branch to which it clung, twitching its tail in a sort of jerky fashion. With music such as that, meaning so much to us, how could we feel otherwise than delighted! For it acted as a charm and a stimulant, putting new life into the physical nature, and sending us on about our duties with a lighter heart. When one of these bright little forerunners of springtide would first make his appearance, or be heard near about the house, all at once there

would be such a scampering out at the door, followed immediately with the exclamation of delight from several voices in chorus, "O, come and see the med-lark!" In the earlier years, when they were more plentiful, the cooing and hooting and drumming of the prairie chickens off in the hills, early in the morning, were to me a peculiarly pleasing announcement of the near approach of spring. On a clear morning they could be heard miles away. They used to fly over in large flocks; but a few years later, when the country became more settled, they were not seen any more in large numbers.

Every year we continued to increase the acreage put to crop. Last year we sowed fifteen acres and a half to wheat. This year it was increased to twenty-two acres; and also about three acres of barley and oats. As in previous years, we still continued breaking and preparing little patches and strips of land here and there in which to plant trees. Always, from quite a little boy, I was an ardent lover of nature. I used to go into the woods and examine and admire the different mosses and lichens and ferns. And that perhaps will account somewhat for the large amount of labor now being spent in that way. Often, as I would be working amongst the trees, I would be accosted by the passers-by with the inquiry shouted across the field, "Are you trying to make a timber claim of your homestead?" I was not trying to make a timber claim as defined by that law, but I was trying, and trying with all my might, to give to it a clear title to having trees on it. It was not many years before we began to reap some little benefit from the time and labor now being expended. It was not much to be sure, but when the minutes were so precious and wood so hard to get, it was not without a sense of pleasure and satisfaction that we went

into the groves, and along the single rows of trees bordering the extensive garden lot, the prospective orchard, and other places—for they were scattered here and there by the hundreds—and trimmed out the superfluous branches.

Every year we put forth great effort to have a good garden. Usually we raised more than was needed of some kinds of vegetables for our own use, so we often gave to neighbors and others of the surplus. I notice, too, in an old memorandum book, that our subscription towards the minister's salary was sometimes partially paid out of the product of the garden and in other similar ways: to so much pork, so many dozen of eggs, so many heads of cabbage, to plowing, to hauling wood, to so many tons of hay, etc. And that is the way many of the pioneer "home missionaries," of the Congregational denomination at least, out on the Nebraska prairies received a considerable portion of their small salary; anything that they could get hold of that could be used; and sometimes perhaps some things that they had no use for. As a matter of course, little things from the same source, but of a gratuitous nature, occasionally found their way to the back door of the parsonage; that is, if it so happened that there was a back door to the abode, for at one time it would be a sod house, perhaps at another dugout, where there would be no way for a back door, unless it was to crawl down the stovepipe and deliver the goods Santa Claus fashion; or it might be something else little better than either of these.

Learning by experience the value of putting a mulch of old hay or straw around the young trees, and also on the potato patch, we used up tons upon tons of this material; hay perhaps that had been damaged by rain. All the straw that we had for years we also used for the same

purpose, for the settlers had not yet learned to feed straw to cattle and horses as they did in after years, but usually set fire to it and burned it up. It is often said, that if there is one class of people more than another who ought to have a good garden, it is the farmers. But by what I have seen farmers as a rule were seriously lacking in that regard. Of course, we could not be blamed very much if we were without those things which went to make up a good garden when the grasshoppers used to pay us those extended visits, feasting both day and night on whatever we had been fortunate enough to prepare for them.

In the first years of our prairie life it was a custom with the settlers to burn off patches of prairie to secure, as they said, early pasturage. Cattle, however, or stock of any kind, were by no means numerous at that time; a single cow and a pair of oxen on one homestead; a cow and a span of horses or mules on another; and on some neither the one nor the other could be seen.

The scenes which we so often witnessed and took active part in, in connection with prairie fires, not always by willing consent, but from stern necessity, if the thought of the awful consequences could be shut out from the mind, were extremely grand. Sometimes when we felt that we had no part to play in the scene—when apparently there was no immediate danger, the night being perfectly still and quite dark, it was one of the grandest sights to look away over the surrounding country in almost any direction, and watch the slowly advancing or receding zigzag, snake-like lines of fire. Sometimes these lines stretched away up over the hills and down through ravines and deep gulches for many miles. If the night should be ever so calm there was always a roaring and

crackling that could be heard a long way off. As these ragged threads of fire advanced over the prairie, stretching themselves over and down to the foot of a hill, hiding themselves away for a little in some narrow vale or deep gulch, they would reappear on the other side, only to repeat the same thing further on. But there were times when, if the wind should not be blowing a gale, it would perhaps be blowing so briskly that we had no inclination, nor thought it safe, to stand and look on placidly, though the fire might be miles away. At such times the watching was not without a good deal of anxiety. As the strong gusts of wind would strike the flames, although so far away, we could plainly hear the roar and see the flames leap forward and upward. And as they went rushing and roaring down the hillsides and into the ravines full of thick, tall grass and weeds, the flames would mount high in the air, accompanied with a roaring and crackling that could be heard two or three miles away. With only a little wind the fire would travel fast, and it might perhaps grow stronger, and we would look to have but little sleep that night. Many times during the night we would get up and look out to see how far away the fire might be, so that we would be prepared for its approach. Sometimes some of us would sit up all night, or lie down on the lounge, feeling it unsafe to take off our clothes. We were always pretty sure the fires would come, and we were relieved of a good deal of anxiety after they had been in and done their work.

CHAPTER XXXII

A Grand Spectacle—Prairie Fires

GRAND beyond description as were the illuminations on so extensive a scale as spoken of in the last chapter, yet a sight of the sublimest grandeur, surpassing and putting into the shade all others, was afforded us when, one still night along some time in May of a later year, we burnt off the meadow. We had previously plowed a strip all around for a fireguard, in which we afterwards planted trees. From the time we went onto the place, except when we had that desperate encounter spoken of in a recent chapter, we had managed to keep the fires out of the meadow. And the grass, having all these years of growth, had become a thick mat. We thought now that we would use this piece of land for the purpose of making hay. So when a favorable night came we carried along a bucket of water, old sacks, and anything that we thought would be of service in case of an emergency; also a large armful of hay. Of course, there was an abundance of old hay right there on the ground, but we could n't spare the time to be pulling up old grass off the prairie to fire with. The night being very dark, the fire showed up to better advantage. When all was ready, Edgar and I each took a whisp of hay to fire with, following each other along alternately, and firing as we went. Ernest and Leonard followed along closely, ready to pounce upon any stray spark or flame that threatened to make trouble. When

we came round to the west side where was the tallest and heaviest of the grass, we bethought ourselves of the two or three little clumps of trees that stood a few rods out. We thought much of these trees, and had cleared away the stuff about them. When we came opposite them, not thinking about the danger, Edgar rushed in to set fire around them, so that it might burn back and meet the other fire and so prevent their being destroyed. The flames mounted high, sending forth intense heat, and dense clouds of smoke rolled low across the meadow, and there was danger from suffocation as well as from the flames. Realizing this, we shouted loudly and in commanding tones, "Get out from there, quick!" Already feeling the effects of the great heat and stifling smoke he needed no second warning, but with head bent down almost to the ground came shooting through the clouds of smoke. Continuing our work of firing, when we came round to the road, we had then only one side to run, and the line here being twice as wide as all the rest, we ran along as fast as we could, shaking off the fire as we went. And in a few minutes more the task that we had rather dreaded was accomplished.

But that sight, so supremely grand, yet remained to be witnessed! The fire all around was working toward the center, the area encircled every moment becoming smaller, and the wild flames, especially all about the lower part where was such a dense growth of old grass, leaped high into the heavens. As we looked away outside the circle all was pitch blackness. Standing there gazing on the magnificent scene we saw the little birds as they were routed so abruptly from their cozy hiding-places, under some little tuft, mount up, and in their bewilderment dart back and forth, seeming not to know what to do or which

way to go. In their affrighted and perilous situation they darted on swift wing from one point to another, only to be confronted with some obstruction in whichever direction they sought to escape. Their pitiful shrill outcry could be heard above the roar of the fire, which became louder and louder as now the flames were coming in closer contact, and their long fiery tongues, reaching out, seemed eager to consume one another. Not being able to endure it any longer, they at last arose above the towering flames and with the swiftness of an arrow from the relaxing bow darted through the dense clouds of smoke, only to seek in vain on their return their accustomed nightly abode. Poor little creatures! I had pity for them, and I should n't wonder if I expressed that feeling in words right there. They were, however, more liable to danger from fright than from the flames, numerous instances being known where caged birds have died from that cause. Take a little mite of a fluffy bird from its cage and hold it in your hand, and in its excitement and fear you will feel its little heart thumping as though it would burst.

The circle was now growing so small that the big, tall flames leaned over and shot out their numerously pronged tongues and seemed to writhe in agony in their intense eagerness to come in deadly combat. At one time rising high in the air, their long slender points determined to submit to no restraint, breaking themselves away, continued their flight upward. Again they would crouch down like some wild animal preparing to make a desperate leap upon its prey, and then suddenly dart at each other across the little circle. Then falling back, as it seemed, to gain new strength and a better position. These tactics would be repeated again and again, till at last it became what appeared to be a hand-to-hand conflict. The

circle was now closing in rapidly, and as the great tall flames reached out and engaged in the last deadly contest, and whirled and twined themselves one around another; and as the air, drawn up by suction through the earth as it seemed, went rushing up between the surging flames, the noise seemed like that of a mighty whirlwind. And at the last desperate effort in the struggle for the mastery, as they coiled themselves like serpents about each other, surging first this way and then that, now bending over and exerting all their powers like athletes endeavoring to force one another to the earth; then standing at full height, tall and erect, but still clutched in each others embrace, their mighty powers being now all spent, suddenly they fall to the earth, and the battle is over. We stand there and look for a few moments in perfect silence, for something about the scene has affected us; for the moment we hardly seem to know where we are; we are blinded, for all about us is blacker than the blackest night, and we have to wait for our vision to come back to us. The greatest and grandest scene of our lives of that nature has vanished out of our sight. Gathering up our things we start homeward, and as we go we stop occasionally and look back, but we can see nothing; all is darkness. As we go slowly up the road, one remarks, "I wonder where the poor little birds are gone to?" And another, "I wish we could have had a picture of that scene." The picture, however, is so indelibly photographed on our minds that it can never be effaced.

We had gone only a little way when whom should we see but the boy's mother standing there in the road waiting for us to come along. She had been near by closely watching all our movements the greater part of the time, and as soon as she had heard the words, "All 's well!" a

spontaneous "Thank God" escaped her lips, as we all walked home together.

As we were walking along the boys were talking about Edgar's little adventure, as we may call it, when their mother heard one of them say, "Why, Edgar, you might have been suffocated!" Of course, that was enough; their mother's quick ear had caught the words, and in rather an excited manner she asked what it meant. On being told only a little of what it related to, she wanted to know all about it, and began to ask a good many questions, and to become more sober.

With strong determination and great courage, and being the oldest, Edgar was always the first to cry out, "O, let me do that!" or, "I 'll go and do that!" He hardly realized or understood what was meant by fear. He was not reckless by any means, but possessed that strong will and undaunted courage which would enable him to risk perils that strong men perhaps would shrink from.

As we kneeled in our humble home that night as was our wont, before retiring to rest, and sent up to the Heavenly Father our acknowledgments of his goodness and mercy for the way he had kept us through the perils of the day, the incident which concerned Edgar's safety, insignificant as it might appear, seemed to call for special recognition of God's care over us. So after some words by myself, as was our habit, my wife followed. Always, as in the present case, when we had engaged in work which to most people would seem to involve no more of danger than all of us are ordinarily liable to, she however seemed to see more. And in her utterances, so simple, yet so full of fervency, and so easily detected in the very tones of her voice, the most sincere words of gratitude would fall from her lips. She would thank the Almighty

for preserving "Dada" and "Edgar," or "Dada and the boys whilst about their dangerous work," always mentioning names. It seemed that she talked with her God as with some dear personal friend right there in her presence, and not as some mysterious, incomprehensible being afar off. And so we brought our evening sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving to a close, by repeating the words which our Savior himself has taught us to use when we pray, "Our Father," etc.

We are slow to realize it, but we are in peril all the day long, and in the night season also. The little scratch on the hand with a pin, or the prick in the foot with a nail, so small it may be that we can scarcely discern it with the naked eye, and if admonished to pay attention to it, we turn aside and say, "O, that's nothing!" These "little things" often prove to be the end of precious lives; whereas, in the case of some very serious accident, where one is cut and maimed and it seems hardly possible that life can hold out, with proper care and attention, health and the right use of limbs are restored and life is saved. If then, God is a preserver of life at all, have we not ample reason to acknowledge that it is he who keeps us from any serious or fatal effects which are possible to result from these "little things," as well as those which come to us more plainly, and which we are made to feel more keenly at the first? These, then, are the things of which my wife seemed never to loose sight. We ought at least to be willing to render daily gratitude for daily and nightly preservation.

If it should happen that any of us received a slight injury in any way—scratched by a cat, pricked with a pin, or anything of a similar nature—the first question would be, "Did you suck it good?" The answer would be per-

haps, "O, I do n't like to do that!" "Well, then," she would say, "come here to me and I 'll do it." And she would apply her lips to the little wound and draw and draw, spitting out the blood, till the patient was made to wince from the rather painful and strange sensation thus produced. Sometimes the boys would say to their mother in a jocular way: "Mother! do you think you could do the same with a black little nigger-boy as you do with us when we get a little scratch?" "Why, yes!" she would reply, "the color on the outside ought n't to make any difference; they are God's human creatures as well as we; to save life or to alleviate pain and suffering why should any distinction be made?"

Springtime with its many occupations had passed away much too rapidly for the amount of work that was needed to be done. Yet for all that it seemed necessary to do some work other than on our own place. I find in an old memorandum book, of which I have several, where it says: "So much time to plowing, to harrowing, to planting potatoes, to cleaning out cellar, to helping on well and fixing up stable, to sawing wood, to helping on John Peter's house in town," etc. The big ravine, too, had overflowed its banks and flooded the little valley, and the great body of water rushing down with tremendous force had brought down weeds and other drift stuff. And the drift, together with the soil that had been washed off the land to the full depth of the plowing, had forced the young trees flat on the ground, and being packed so solidly about them, it was with the greatest difficulty and hard work that it could be removed.

Whether or not we were prepared for the coming of harvest it made no difference, it always made its appearance in its season, and whatever we might then be engaged

in had to be laid aside. So this year again, as I had done the year before, I worked all through the harvest, stacking headed grain. The grain, however, was damaged a good deal on account of rust, and falling over as it did, it was necessary to cut it very low, which made it exceedingly hard to stack. But for all that, I often received flattering comment for my work.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Last Load of Hay, and the Crowning Event

OUR old enemies, the grasshoppers, who very considerately favored us with an intermission of their visits last year, have now determined to renew their old acquaintance. And just as though they were made ever so welcome, we find them swarming everywhere and making themselves perfectly at ease. They do not swarm over the whole country as they did two years before, but in our own immediate vicinity they are even more numerous than they then were. They cover all vegetation; stripping the big, tall weeds of their leaves, and gnawing the bark off the young trees and brushwood; tools, if left out only a little while, were so chewed that the result of their use afterwards was terribly sore and blistered hands. Fortunately, however, all the small grain had been cut and stacked and out of the way of their ravages. But the corn and other crops are still at their mercy. We had, I remember, a little patch of garden close by the house, and the grasshoppers were quietly chewing away and eating everything up, even the onions they ate out of the ground. They seemed to be fond of onions, on account, I presume, of the opiate they contained, which enabled them to sleep the better. Nevertheless, they were much too wide awake for us even then. Standing there by the house looking on helplessly at this great army calmly and noiselessly work-

ing away on everything all around, and almost completely covering the walls of the old sod house, whilst others were fluttering all about and striking us in our faces, my wife seemed to get "out of patience with them," as she would sometimes say. And as she started suddenly for the small patch, she said, "I'm determined the greedy things shan't have quite all of them," and brought back a few little bits of partly devoured onions. And these had to suffice for our use that year. This vast army of foragers was still with us, and we had been down to "meeting" I remember, for it was Sunday morning. After the service was over, we invited a young man named Robert Hare to go home with us and take dinner. When part way home we could see in the Northwest what appeared to be a big black cloud stretching for a great distance along the horizon, as of a thunderstorm coming up. Our friend, however, suggested that it might be another mighty army of grasshoppers coming. As we drew nearer the house, the cloud, or whatever it might be, seemed to be advancing rapidly toward us, and was very low, and we began now to hear a great noise. It seemed something between a buzzing and a rumbling, hard to describe, and got louder as the black-looking mass came nearer. We were not long in doubt, for just as we reached the house, suddenly the sun, which before was full of glow and brightness, became obscured, and the whole heavens above, and stretching away for miles, were darkened. It was another great army of grasshoppers passing over. They were so vast in numbers, that although so low down, the eye could penetrate only a little way into the living, moving mass. Only a few of them settled down. They were some time in passing over, and the great noise they made with their silvery, gauze-like wings could be heard after they had drifted

quite a long distance away to the southeast. As we stood by the house gazing up at them, and as they were fluttering all about us, all of a sudden there was a great stir and a flurry amongst those that had been keeping us close company for several days, and taking wing they mounted up, and sailed way with their comrades of the second division. They had done an immense amount of damage to the settlers. And though only a few scraps were left to us after our guests had done their feasting, it was with no sense of regret on our part that they got up from the table so abruptly and with so little ceremony. As they were making such a bustling and scurrying to get away, we thought that, if they could show no better manners when on a friendly visiting tour than to be so "greedy" as to leave us little or nothing on which to subsist after saying good-bye, we would prefer the space they occupied rather than their presence. Whether or not they heard our thoughts and took the hint I would not pretend to say. But it seemed as though they did, for they never called on us again in sufficient numbers to do any very serious damage. And so far as we were concerned, we were glad to quit their acquaintance, though it had been of several years' standing. It is not always an easy matter to discover who are our real friends, but it is sooner discovered in some than in others.

Of the twelve acres of corn that we had in the field, half of it was already destroyed, and the other so badly damaged that we gathered only a little from it. Whatever loss the settlers sustained during this period of hard struggle, though small as it might appear, they felt it keenly.

Here are a few sentences from a letter written by Edgar to his cousins in England about four months later

than this, being a boy's description of the appearance and work of the grasshoppers. He says:

"I will now tell you how much of a crop we had last summer: wheat, twenty-two acres. The wheat crop this year is not good. We planted an acre or more of potatoes; most of them, or rather the ground they were planted in, we did not dig. The grasshoppers and bugs damaged them so badly that it would not have paid us for the trouble of digging them. We had in twelve acres of corn; but the grasshoppers ate half of it and badly damaged the other. It will make you stare, perhaps, when I tell you we have seen clouds of them; they look like smoke from a locomotive after it gets a little way from the engine, but so much more in size and length. They stretch away for miles, and when they settle they are so thick on the maize-stalks that they look black with them. I have seen as many as four or five hundred of them on one stalk. Maize grows from five to eight or nine feet high. There is a continual roar when they are thick."

About this time Edgar met with rather a bad accident, if the willful kicking over by a surly old ox may be called an accident. One of the oxen, "Roney," a very sly-looking old fellow, one day, when Edgar was getting ready to go out to work, took it into his head—and his heels too—that all work and no play was no more good for a drony old ox than for a boy full of life and energy. So to have a little change, he hoisted one of his hind legs and struck out behind with tremendous force, and laid Edgar sprawling flat on his back, and then stepped on his ankle. It was so badly bruised that he had to lie on his old lounge nearly a week before he could put his foot to the ground, and it was some time before he could go out to work again.

During this time he amused himself by making miniature models of harvest machinery, etc.

How very easy it is to be deceived in the appearance of a thing! In surveying a sleepy-looking old ox one would imagine that there would be ample time, after seeing the old fellow's foot held aloft, to get far enough away to be out of all danger when the charge came. But when it comes to an ox striking out behind, and a little on the skew, anybody who has had only a little experience even with that kind of a joke, will come to the conclusion without hesitancy, that the kick from an ox, even though he be old and stiff, compares quite favorably with the same kind of a thing administered by a mule, about which we have always heard so much.

We had at this time, including calves, eleven head of cattle, and were needing to put up about twenty tons of hay, besides what else we might have in the way of fodder. We had managed to get our hay up earlier this fall than in previous years. We had been working and making all the haste we could, besides doing all other ordinary work that demanded daily attention for about three weeks, when the last load was hauled in and the stack "topped out" on the evening of a certain day in September. No special note of the fact was ever made on paper, and some might wonder how it is that I have carried in my mind through all these years the exact time of hauling that particular load of hay. One reason is, a remark made by my wife sometimes, "I never forget the time when you finished getting up your hay that year." Of course, after hearing this occasional remark a few times I got so well to understand what it referred to that there was no need of explanation. But the event that called forth the

remark was of so important a nature that no room was left for doubt. I remarked when first entering upon a review of a few of the occurrences of the present year, if all could be related, as one pretty well crowded with events, and in one respect at least, the most eventful up to this time.

Somewhere along in the night—and although it was night—something of the nature of a sunbeam found its way into the old sod house; that at least is the way an old friend described it in his first letter after the event took place. Other sunbeams, if that is what they were, had made their appearance, only for a little time, and, weary of their stay, had flitted away and settled down beneath the shades of the weeping-willow and the beautifully rich and dark evergreen shrub. One in that delightful suburb called Finchly, and the other in that of Abney Park. Both places none more beautiful in or near all London. These beams that came before, however, were of the same nature and likeness and, therefore, ordinary. But this was a different kind of a sunbeam, such as we had not seen before. And the interval between the coming of this last and those of former times all went to show that it was an extraordinary one. This then is what makes the event so notable, and the last load of hay so easily remembered. And still further, the event marks the centennial year of our adopted country's independence. These lights which had aforetime come into our home were all boys; but now, after the lapse of eight years, it may be but faintly imagined the delight and right royal welcome which manifested itself when this sunbeam, different from all the rest, made its appearance in the old sod house to illumine and brighten up its murky walls, in the form of a girl baby—the first and only American-born. This welcome

extended to the little one, though royal as it was, was utterly void of any of the glittering splendor usually attendant on the ushering into the world of prospective queens and princesses. Little, indeed, could be done to the rude poles and old rusty hay overhead, and the gray, mud-plastered walls all around. But for all that it seemed a veritable palace for the time being. This reminds me of an instance, the only one of that nature that I have ever heard tell of. The event took place a long way back, nearly two thousand years ago, when the most noted personage ever known made His advent into the world—not in as comfortable a place as an old sod house on the Western Plain even. For it is said that there was no room in the house at the place where the parents of the child happened to be staying; so there was no other way than to go out among the cattle. No rude, home-made lounge even as had our little “princess”—as one in particular was sometimes heard to call her—on which he could be laid. But the most convenient and comfortable place was a manger from which the cattle gathered up and munched their fodder. Such it was that served the place of a cradle for him who, it was said, was not only a king, but King over all other kings. And that is what makes the contrast so much more striking and noticeable. He was called by many wonderful names, in fact; one of them was, “Wonderful;” another, “Counsellor;” another, “The Mighty God;” another, “The Everlasting Father;” and yet another, “The Prince of Peace.” And it was still further asserted that he possessed all power, and, though but a newly-born babe, could have done whatever he may have willed; yet he came in this humblest of all humble ways to be an example to the world, and to “teach men so.”

If this event, which was the cause of so much commotion within the old sod walls, had taken place about three years and a half earlier, when that awful blizzard was raging, and the bony frames of the two big, gaunt oxen were sharing our apartments, though very widely from it even then, yet we may perhaps be pardoned if we say that somewhat of a resemblance to the surroundings of the babe in the manger and among the cattle would have been afforded.

Let me again quote a few lines from that letter of Edgar's. And by what he says it will be seen that this was the first thing on his mind to tell about. He says:

"The first thing that I must certainly tell you of is that we have the most welcome visitor we could wish for; it is in the shape of a little sister. You may well imagine we are the proudest of boys, and father and mother of parents. The least we can say of her is that she is very pretty, and good-natured; so much so that mother says anybody would hardly know there was a baby in the house. Some think she is like me; and some, like mother; and some think she is like herself. Whoever she is like, if she is half as good if she is permitted to stay with us till she grows up as she is now, she will be a blessing to us all."

It will be pretty well understood from what has gone before that we were ill prepared for the coming of so important a visitor, though perhaps not more so than would have been many other households around us. The cookstove—the only one we had, of course—was in the little narrow room that we had built onto the house; for it was yet too early to have it in the living-room. I had previously laid down a temporary floor of rough boards, and as soon as my wife had gained strength and

was able to be up she was taken into this little room, so as to be by the stove. Not being provided with an arm-chair, nor a rocker of any sort, I temporized a substitute, which served the purpose excellently. Having a few sacks of wheat piled up at one end of the room, as well as I could I built these into the form of an "easy-chair." It was a massive and cumbersome affair, as may be supposed; for it extended a good way across the room, which was only about eight feet wide. But after putting nice, soft pillows in the seat and covering the whole with blankets and comforters it turned out to be such as many would choose to rest in rather than a finely upholstered ten or fifteen dollar chair, good enough for a queen to sit in, even such a one as occupied it. And I don't know, though funny as it may seem, if it had not been for the sore need of grinding that chair into powder and making it into bread to sustain life, but that I would have kept it, and, after having served well our own time and purpose, let it go down to future posterity as an heirloom. But there were times when wheat to make bread was a more imperative necessity than was the same material to make easy-chairs. So that any inclination that we may have had to show to generations yet a good way off how that necessity, with their forefathers, and mothers, too, came to be the "mother of invention," even to that of making bread to eat and chairs to lounge in out of the same material, seemed impossible of gratification.

It may be thought that by this time, when, the few cattle gradually increasing, enabling us to make a few pounds of butter, and we were getting a few eggs, by these means considerable help would be afforded us in our living. But, as I have stated before, for working the amount of land now opened up—besides, the oxen bought

on time, and for which we had as yet been able to pay but little more than the interest—it seemed absolutely necessary that implements be procured in the same way or the work on the place be seriously impeded. And so it was, as time went on debts increased. These debts, though, were a continual worry to me, and I was troubled a good deal in consequence. The nights were unrestful: lying awake hour after hour thinking and pondering over some note of perhaps only a small amount that might be coming due, with no money in sight to meet the obligation. Such a state of affairs existing with many others—for almost all seemed to be “rowing in the same boat” in that respect—apparently had no ill effects with them; for they seemed to let things drift their own way. A time would come, however, when a suit would be instituted. But for myself, I could on no account allow matters to go to such an extreme. If there was no other way, rather than do that I would dispose of every bit of property that had a cent’s worth of value in it and go out over the prairies and beg—a poor place, though, for that profession—if I could procure nothing else better adapted to my taste. And so, to keep as far away from the lawyers and courts as possible, we often deprived ourselves of some of the actual necessities of life. The little butter occasionally, and the few dozen eggs—as low sometimes as six or seven cents a pound and a dozen, and sometimes hard to dispose of even for that—were taken away when they were actually needed in the home in order that debts might be that much reduced. It is often said that a farmer is at fault if he and his family go short of all that they need. This may be true if he be free from debt; but if he be not, and has not the means to pay these debts, then the case comes to be altogether a different one. The circumstances

in the lives of others depend largely on the payment of these debts; and whether or not a farmer, or any other person, is justified in taking to himself all that he and his family have need, and thereby lessening his ability to settle with his creditors, thus being the cause of depriving them of at least a portion of the necessaries of life and causing them to suffer, some may think is a matter for argument. But for my part, if inconvenience or suffering be entailed, I prefer myself to bear it. People are often heard to say: "I'm here in the world, and have a right to a living; and I am going to have it." And they seem not to care very much who may suffer in order that they may live and not suffer. This, then, is the reason why the little butter and eggs, or whatever it might be, went out from the house where they were so much needed very often that we, as far as possible, might bear our misfortunes alone.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A Friend in Need Is a Friend Indeed; or, Unpacking the Box

LONG articles sometimes appear in newspapers and other places—pictures painted in glowing colors—how this and that man went out West and settled on a quarter-section of Government land, and, by dint of hard labor and frugal living, gathered about him a large amount of property and is now “well fixed.” No one doubts there are such cases as are often described. But outward appearances are not always a true indicator of the exact nature of a case. My own experience has taught me that this is so.

One of the settlers being in our house one day was telling of his being downtown and talking with a man who had just come into the country and was looking for land. Whilst they were standing there by the old store, surveying the country all around, our few head of cattle were being driven over the hills to the creek to water. Telling us what he said to the newcomer, he went on:

“I said to him: ‘Now just look on the hill over there across the creek. The man who owns that bunch of cattle came here when the country was first opened, with not a cent in his pocket; and now see what he’s got! He has, too, one of the prettiest places in the whole county.’”

The difference between the man and myself was this, that he did n't know that a mortgage was fluttering over the heads of those cattle, but I did. And so long as that condition existed I never really felt that I did actually "own that bunch of cattle."

Another instance. Just about this time a paper was gotten up and published; just the one issue. I don't know that it bore any title, but they called it "advertising the county." A "Decoy Bird" would have been the most appropriate name; for there was scarcely a word of truth in the whole sheet. From what source the publishers obtained their information I am at a loss to know. But I read in this paper the grossest misstatements as to my possessions, and all sorts of things. And the same thing ran through the statements of all others whose names were found there; and, also, as to the general nature of the country. But that seemed to please some, rather than otherwise, as so many are pleased in that way; and copies of the paper were sent to relatives and friends. And by what these people read in the paper they would naturally suppose that the settlers were literally buried up in wealth, whilst, in fact, many of them were buried head and heels under heavy mortgages. And these are only one or two instances among thousands of others where the outward appearances and the inward facts are extremely wide apart. Such papers find their way across the water also; I caught a glimpse of some of them myself while yet in the Old World; and not infrequently they are the means of alluring people from comfortable and pleasant homes.

If any of the farmers in those days, after a balance of accounts had been struck, found themselves cumbered with very much of "a competency," I never knew them.

I have, however, known some who were "pretty well fixed." The "fixing" process, though, did not come up out of the ground on top of cornstalks, nor wheat-heads, the result of blistered and calloused palms. The soil, generally, was rich; but it was not rich enough to produce results like that. That discovery was usually made after the person had served one or two terms in some fairly remunerative county office, maybe; or as internal revenue collector, or had sat in some cozy corner in the halls of legislature, or something else akin to one or other of these.

These remarks, of course, apply more to the first settlers. In years later others, who possessed the means, after all the "roughing" had been done, came in and bought out the majority of the early settlers who had kept their heads above water as long as they could, and others also who saw that they must soon go under.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed." If we had sympathetic friends anywhere in the world we had them in St. Louis. Solicitous to an extreme concerning our welfare, it is only natural to suppose that our lady friend was often making inquiries as to the circumstances in which we were placed. The first letter that came after the discovery was made as to the new condition of things in the household was crowded full of the most genuine and tenderest sympathy. She begins by saying:

"I have thought so much about you lately that I can not rest until I have written this letter to ascertain more of your real and present wants."

She goes out among her friends to gather up a few things that might be needful and of good service in such a case. Some things are promised; but she seems to get out of patience at the seeming indifference of some of

her friends that they do not "go ahead" and do quickly what they intend to do; "for the cold weather will soon be here, and I am very anxious about you."

Somewhat the friendship of the one of whom I speak has always been of a nature so peculiar. We had never been permitted to look into her face, and had never known her; that is, in the sense that we had ever seen her. All that we have to picture to us something of the likeness of our friends are two old and faded photographs, which, after repeated appeals, were rather reluctantly sent to us; for she said: "The pictures are scratched and faded, and are not good ones, and I hardly like to send them." The scratches may be there; but when we look at the pictures we see only our good friends and their kind deeds. In the same letter she says:

"Past letters you have written I must hunt up, and re-read them, and endeavor to form a better idea of your hardships, mode of living, and size and appearance of your home. Here I will mention that all your letters have been to me very interesting, both for their contents and the style and language. You express yourself well, and the penmanship is beautiful. Usually I do not like to see other people's letters—they are too often illiterate and badly written—but yours are an exception, and I intend to gather together all as they have come, in rotation, and send in one package to some of my friends, and insist on their reading them."

We are told, in another letter, that a box is made up and will be shipped on a certain day. But that day was always a busy one at the office, or store, and the men could not spare the time to take it to the depot. It is getting late, and she is very anxious and beginning to worry lest I have the long journey to Columbus and find the box not

there. She writes a letter and leaves it open, waiting to see if the men come; but, finding they do not, she again goes to it and writes:

"It is now half past three o'clock, and I am feeling very uneasy indeed at this moment, because you have received notice that the box would be shipped to-day, and it is still here. This having to wait other people's tardy movements is very trying to my patience."

Still she waits, and after a while comes again to the letter, and writes: "Near four o'clock, and the box still here!"

By what I glean from her letter I can see her as she impatiently paces the room back and forth, first to the window, and then to the door, and looks out to see if the men are coming. They do not come, however, and in a tone almost of despair she says:

"Well, all I can do now is to hope this delay will not inconvenience you unnecessarily; I am helpless to do more!"

In time, however, the box came all right. I hardly need say, I think, that it was not on account of what the box contained that we appreciated our friends so highly. Truly grateful as we were for all temporal and material aid, it was the motive back of it, the power which forced the act into being that we valued beyond estimate. For we recognize that when we find a person carrying a heavy load it will oftentimes cost us less time and thought to give him the relief he seems to need by putting money into his hand than it will to put into his heart the cheer and courage necessary to enable him to be victorious in his stress. It is always better to make a disheartened man strong and brave, that he may fight his own battles through to victory,

than it is to fight his battles for him. As Emerson puts it: "The chief want in life is somebody who shall make us do what we can." It is not money so much that the poor are in need of, but the sympathy and love of friends. If these be furnished, material things will be their swift accompaniment.

We had no team now that we could drive to Columbus and get the box; for just when the correspondence was going on the old ox, "Roney," died. But I found a way to get to Columbus, and had the box brought as far as our old friend Thompson's place, at St. Edwards. And after I got home we borrowed a team and wagon, and Edgar and I started out to get it, thirteen or fourteen miles. Snow was on the ground, and it was bitterly cold. We bound our heads about with pieces of an old shawl, and had frequently to get down from the wagon to keep our feet from freezing. We spun along at a pretty lively gait, for the horses seemed to like the cold no better than we did, and needed no urging. It was growing colder as the sun was getting ready to hide herself away for the night; and as the horses dashed along the breath from their nostrils puffed out in clouds before them, and the snow crunched under the wheels, making that peculiar singing noise, which could be heard a long distance off in the still, clear air. We could stand it to ride only a little way at a time, so took turns driving. It was nearly dark when we reached home, and when we got into the house we discovered a round spot on Edgar's face that was frozen. It was as white and smooth as a piece of marble. Whilst he was warming himself and trying to bring out the frost by rubbing his face with snow I got the box into the house. By that time Edgar was ready

again and quite willing to drive home the team, a mile and a half up the valley, Ernest accompanying him.

Our good lady friend had exercised great forethought about such matters, and in the box were found some little nourishments that served well the special needs of my wife in her weak condition. There was also clothing. Not like the things that came through the relief organizations two years before, the articles were all good, and clean. Some of our neighbors participated in the benefit; for we gave to each of four different persons a good overcoat, besides other things to women and children.

I wonder what she would have thought and what would have been her feelings if our friend could have been present in some place of hiding and witnessed the proceedings as the unpacking of the box went on!

I am inclined to think that on hearing the exclamations of delight from the boys as the different articles were taken out for inspection she would have experienced such a delight that it would have repaid her many times over for the time and labor spent in trying to make others happy. For, it seems to me, there is no satisfaction or happiness that can come to us so great as that which comes by trying to put sunshine and happiness into the lives of those who may be needy and in distress. And more especially is it so if it becomes necessary to sacrifice some of our own comforts and pleasures in order to do it. The boys were so overflowing with delight that they seemed to have no patience as they hovered around the box to allow the articles to be taken out one by one. But each would have something holding up in his hand, clamoring for the attention of all the rest to something

that was "just splendid." "O, just look at this, now!" one would say, turning it about and scrutinizing the article. "This will be just the thing for you, Edgar, when you go journeys with father; won't it?"

"Look here! Look here! Whatever is this for, I wonder?" called out another, having got hold of something he had never seen the like before.

"Why, that's for mother! Don't you know that?" was the response.

"What is that you have?" inquired their mother.

"Why, something for you, mother! I'm glad they sent that for you, mother!"

"Let me see it, please?" she said; and the article was quickly passed over to her.

"That's the very thing I've been wanting so long; it seems as though they must have known that I was needing something of that kind. And everything is so good, you see; not like those things that some of the people got the other grasshopper times! I'm sure we ought all to be very thankful to God, and to Mrs. Cadick, and think ever so much of her for sending us these nice things; I don't know how to be thankful enough myself. I wish it was so that we could send her one of our nicest and largest fat turkeys for her Thanksgiving dinner."

This wish was inclosed in the next letter that soon found its way to St. Louis; but it was easily seen that it would have cost far more than the turkey was worth to get it there. So the will was readily accepted in place of the deed.

"O, my! Now just look at this again, will you?" they would burst out again. "That will be exactly my

fit; I know it will. That will be just the thing for me to wear Sundays, won't it?"

And so the excitement continued till the bottom of the box had been reached.

This was an occasion for sitting up later than usual; for we hardly realized that the time was passing so rapidly as we sat there gathered around the stove after having looked all through the box. The joyous and more spirited talk of only a few minutes before had now given way to that of a more sober nature; and the tones of the voice were quiet and subdued as we spoke of the hardships, the difficulties, the dangers, and the murky atmosphere that we had thus far waded through. Ever having it in mind Who it was that had led us safely along thus far, as the moisture gathered in her eyes, the sainted woman could not refrain from bringing this specially before us. Many incidents of the past were reviewed and brought vividly to our minds; some imminent peril at one time, hard living at another, obstacles which looked like high mountains at another.

"And yet we're still here to thank God," she would say. "He can take care of us; and when we have done all that is in our power, confiding faith and trust in him will do the rest."

And so, before closing our eyes in slumber, it need not be doubted that the sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving heaped upon the altar that night was ample to set all ablaze the coals already burning. For the fire on that altar set up ere we left the motherland, no matter where its abiding place, whether in the crowded little bunk on the big ship "rocked in the cradle of the deep; whether on the speedy railway car or on the broad, open

prairies, with howling wolves to keep us company; whether in the little dugout cabin or the old sod house, had never been permitted to smolder and die out.

Not an easy matter at all times to feel that this kind of training is profitable, and will work out good for us in the end; but yet:

“Sometimes 'mid scenes of deepest gloom,
Sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,
By waters still, o'er troubled sea,
Still 't is His hand that leadeth me.”

CHAPTER XXXV

Hunting for an Ox

LITTLE things make great commotions sometimes. Our first and only daughter, who has been the cause of my saying so much, was quite small; but that deficiency was amply compensated for in other ways. She was a healthy child, and as full of life as a jumping, chirping cricket. A neighbor, an Englishman, seemed to find great delight in teasing her; telling her that she was "a little Johnny Bull," which appellation she indignantly resented. She did n't like it a bit, and would say, with a good deal of emphasis, "I ain't Johnny Bull; I 's 'merica!" In an old letter to relatives in England, I read this: "The little Ada is growing; but she is small-featured, pretty, and as good as she is pretty; gives us many hours of pleasure that we would be deprived of without her; she is now seventeen months old." And again: "Ada, though small, is full of life, and seems to know everything far beyond her age; there is quite a fuss if she is not allowed to stand on a box and wipe dishes; and she goes about it like an old experienced hand." Again, I read: "Ada is growing rather tall; has enough life and activity for a dozen of her age, and it takes more time to keep her out of mischief than we can well spare."

And so it was in all future letters; the little one came in for a good share of comment on account of her brightness. And this is she whom an old friend in London

spoke of as a "sunbeam"—a good thing to have about the house, especially a sod house, away and alone on the prairie, when the days sometimes as well as the nights are dark and gloomy, and a need of more light is felt.

The reader will readily call to mind that Edgar's letter to his cousins in England told of the "welcome visitor, in the shape of a little sister," and predicted that she would be a blessing to us all. I wonder how he felt about it when she came to be three or four years old; whether or no his opinion was subject to revision, when, as he would be busily at work with his thread and "cobbler's wax," mending shoes or something of that kind, she would slyly steal up to his little box and grab up the sticky, black-looking wax and run off to some place of hiding and eat it up, smudging her hands and face all over! I have wondered sometimes when I have seen him start up suddenly from his chair and scurry away after the "little welcome visitor," as she would go for the open door as fast as her legs would carry her, making off with his wax, whether just at that moment he felt her to be the "blessing" he had prophesied. He may by this time have got the idea that the blessing had got twisted round the other way. Sometimes he would be rummaging in his box, and pretty soon he would call out: "Now, that girl's been at my wax again; I know she has! I'll just give it to her, if I can get hold of her!" Fortunately, he inserted that proviso, "If I can get hold of her." That's just what made the matter so complicated, the getting hold of her. For it was like attempting to catch a fly on a wall; by the time you got ready to strike, the fly was not there any longer.

Having lost one of the oxen, we were now without

a team to work with; and bad as the situation was before, this placed us in a still worse predicament. I tramped long distances trying to find an "odd ox;" but it seemed that nobody in the country had one to dispose of. However, after having almost despaired of finding one, I heard that a man named Armstrong, living over on the "Cedar," away up the valley, had one to sell. So early one morning, I started out afoot, in the hope of bringing back an ox. I had no money, and, of course, if I got one at all, it would have to be on time. I struck the river where a man named James Robinson lived on the other side. There was a little blacksmith's shop there, and a kind of store, in which was the post-office, called Dayton. As I stood there gazing at the river, with the ice extending out some distance on either side, and wondering how I was going to get across, the mail-carrier happened to come along; and, fortunately for me, he was a kindly-disposed mail-carrier; not like one of his kind some years before, who seemed to experience no little pleasure in seeing me hang on to the hind end of his wagon for twenty miles and more. This man seemed to understand pretty well my dilemma, and as soon as he came up, called out to me, "Jump right in!" I could hardly think, from the good-natured smile that flitted over his broad, flat face, that he meant that I should jump right into the river; so not waiting for another command, I jumped right into his buggy, and we were soon out on the opposite bank. And I mused as we drove along, what a radical change would take place, and how many heavy burdens would be lifted from the shoulders of those who are now borne down under them; and how much pleasanter and happier to live in this world would be if, not only mail-carriers, but all sorts and conditions

of people, would exhibit in their common, every-day living, the same pleasant and kindly disposition as did this man.

I learned from the man that he was going to the very house that I was bound for—a post-office called Dublin having recently been established there. This was good news for me. For I was pretty well assured from the looks of the man that I would not be compelled, whilst going at a six or seven mile gait, to hang on behind the wagon. We arrived at the place toward evening. There was no other house near, but this one stood there alone on the claim. As soon as we arrived at the house I told Mr. Armstrong what I was hunting for, and was not a little disappointed when he said, “Yes; I’ve an ox I’ll sell; but am in need of money, and can’t let him go without the cash.” I talked and argued with him some time; but failing to bring him to my terms, I ceased to talk any more on the matter.

It was now dark, and the good old lady of the house—they were Irish, if I mistake not, as the name of the post-office would indicate—had spread the cloth for supper, and very kindly invited me to sit at the table with them, and also to stay with them that night. For this I was grateful, and was thus relieved of begging that privilege myself; for there was nowhere else that I could go. After supper was over, we all sat round the red-hot stove, and spent a couple of hours chatting on various topics—the country, crops, grasshoppers, etc.—and then retired for the night, being all in one room, they having two or three sons, men grown.

The next morning, as I was preparing to set out on my long tramp home, I asked how much I had to pay. But by their very looks, the mere suggestion of receiv-

ing payment would not be listened to, and the hearty response that came back in reply was, "Whenever you're this way again, don't forget to call and see us; we'll be glad to see you any time!"

When I got back near to the ford, I began again to wonder how I was going to cross the river. But the thought struck me that I would go and see Mr. Robinson, whose house was near by. I had seen him a few times, and had become a little acquainted with him. I had learned where he lived from a brother of his, who lived lower down the valley, near to where the town of Cedar Rapids was built some years later. Mr. Robinson was working around outside the house, and as I drew near he recognized me. "Hello!" said he; "what in the world are you doing over in this part of the country, so far away from home?" "Well, to tell you the truth," I said, "it so happens that I'm on the wrong side of the river, and am trying to think out some scheme that will transplant me on the other side just as quickly as possible; for I have quite a long walk yet before reaching home." "Yes, I should think you have! I guess I can fix you out all right, though. But it's near time for dinner; come into the house and eat; for you've had quite a walk already." I thanked him quite profusely for his kindness, and pleaded to be excused, as I was anxious to be on my way. Not that I had the least objection to the dinner; but I knew that I would be late getting home as it was. But when it comes to sitting at the table with that kind of people, excuses don't count for much; they just brush them aside easier than brushing cobwebs from a wall. There seemed to be no way of escape, so we went at once to the house, he telling his wife to "hurry up" with the dinner. But by the

way she was scurrying around, I thought she was doing that already; for she saw us coming, and understood what it meant. As soon as we had done eating, Mr. Robinson went to the barn and brought out one of his horses, and led him down to the river. "He's a quiet old chap," he said, "and will carry you across all right." I didn't feel so confident about that myself, however, and was wondering all the time how things would turn out before I landed on the opposite bank. But I didn't want him to think that I was afraid, so I kept very quiet—the way I always did in such a case. I had had but little to do with horses, and was never on a horse's back but once before in my life that I am aware of, and then only for a few minutes. But the minutes were transformed into days that it took to forget the experience. Like Mr. Robinson's horse, it had no saddle, and that perhaps accounted for the effect it produced. "When you get across," he said, "just turn his head this way, and he'll come back all right." So with Mr. Robinson's aid, I climbed onto his back, and, digging my knees into his flanks so that they would hold good and fast, and holding on like a leach, I had the old fellow move along slowly and cautiously, and so reached the other side without any mishap. Dismounting, I turned the horse's head toward the river. The old fellow stood there in rather a sleepy kind of way, as though he didn't care a straw how things went; but his master called to him by name, and he started right in, and was soon across to the other side. Mr. Robinson was turning to go away, but apparently had forgotten something, and the sound came ringing across the water, "When you're this way again, do n't forget to give us a call!"

A person traveling over the Western prairies, and un-

acquainted with the people, having occasion to make numerous calls during a day's journey, would be apt to wonder if there was any meaning to this phrase, "Do n't forget to call again." After hearing the same thing repeated over and over again, he is perhaps inclined to think that it is only custom, after all; that it is nothing more than the last item in a schedule of things that must be said when the guest or caller is driving away. But if somehow, no matter if he be the biggest stranger, he finds himself at one of these places at meal-time, and the command rather than an invitation is given, "Now, bring up your chair," followed the next minute with "Pitch right in, and help yourself;" that is, if it be the man of the house; but if it be the woman, with this phrase modified, "Now, you just make yourself perfectly at home, and help yourself to anything you see;" he begins then to realize that there is a real meaning to it. Whether a blessing be asked on the meal depends, of course, on what may be the custom of the family. But if they themselves do not recognize its need, if they be aware that the same is a custom with their guest, they will, out of respect for him if for no higher motive, request that he perform that sacred duty.

The idea seems to prevail in the minds of many of the people of the Eastern States that we out here on the wild Western prairies are hardly far enough advanced in civilization to have such customs. They seem to think of us as being so much mixed up with cowboys, Indians, and Buffalo Bill's "Wild West" that we are apart from them. It might be well, perhaps, for such persons to spend a little time and come out here and visit some of our institutions of learning—especially the Christian institutions—and learn from them why it

is that we are the least illiterate of all the States in the Union, in spite of being so closely associated with the different tribes of Indians and cowboys of the plains.

After leaving the river, I trudged along up over hills and down through deep gulches, winding about a good deal, like a ship "tacking about" on the ocean when the wind is unfavorable; and it was after dark when I reached home. The folks were glad enough to see me back; but, like myself, they were a good deal disappointed, Edgar especially, when they learned that I had not brought home an ox.

We began now to wonder how we were going to get along without a team, and the talk that night was of a grave nature. I had been offered a yoke of oxen on a year's time, but I could hardly bear the thought of taking it; for we had been able to pay but little more than the interest on the principal for those bought a year and a half before. But I had exhausted every means trying to find a single ox, and had failed. Work with a team had been at a standstill nearly two months, and we were already in December; the winter was upon us, and wood for fuel and other purposes had yet to be provided in some way. So in the face of all these facts, the only thing that it seemed that we could do was to buy the yoke offered me by our neighbor, Cummings. So I gave him my note for one hundred and thirty dollars, with interest at the rate of twelve per cent per annum.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Up in the Doctor's Operating-Room

THINKING of the way the winter evenings were spent—some of them, at least—in a letter of Edgar's to his cousins, dated December of this year—1876—I am reminded that considerable reading was done. Papers were sent from the old home, and in speaking of them he says: "I thank you and Uncle Henry very much for the papers you have sent us, as they interest me so much; I am very impatient to open them. In fact, they interest us all, coming as they do from home." He then tells them about the number of cattle, chickens, turkeys, etc., that we have; and about the new yoke of oxen. "They are not paid for yet," he says; "but we have to do the best we can." Hear what he says about the sport the boys have had:

"The first winter we were here we caught two wolves and six or seven foxes. The foxes are very savage when cornered; their fur is very nice; they are not as large as the English fox, but are very fleet. We have here also rabbits, about the size of a hare; they also are very swift. I shot a very large one not very long ago. I have also shot prairie-chickens, which are almost the same in size and color and the way they fly as the English partridge. Wild ducks and geese fly over in almost countless numbers in the spring and fall. I have killed four geese. The last one I killed, not more than two months

ago, measured five feet from the tip of one wing to the other. I have shot four ducks and four prairie-chickens. We have killed a large number of snakes; I have killed quite forty. Of course, they have not been very large; the largest one was about five feet long. The rattlesnakes are the most dangerous; their bite is fatal if not treated in time. They 'most always warn you when you are near them by making a noise with their rattles; they being on the end of their tail, you can not rattle them as they do, as they move them so very fast. I have killed four or five of them. One that I killed ran—or, rather, glided—after me quite fast; I, however, kept out of his way. Ernest, and even Leonard, have killed them. It will please you, perhaps, if I send you the rattles of one."

The rattlesnakes, he says, "almost always warn you when you are near them." And I have heard others say that they "always warn you." But that is not so. I have myself, in several instances, approached them so nearly as to be in the act of taking a step and coming right down upon them as they would be coiled up apparently asleep; and it has been with difficulty that I have balanced myself so as to take the step backward, as they were discovered all so suddenly, and they were not disturbed nor made any noise. In fact, two years ago, whilst attending some young trees in a newly-planted orchard, I stood right on one with one foot. It was coiled up in the dirt and weeds, and I was not aware of it, as the reader may be sure. I did not discover it till I lifted my foot, and it glided out three or four feet, and then coiled and faced me. I struck him twice with a sharp hoe that I was using, and I think he must have been sulky or dazed, for he made not the least noise

till after the second blow, which severed his head as clean as though it had been cut with a sharp knife. Then for the first time he brought his rattles into play, and used them for all they were worth for quite a little while. But I have his rattles now, instead of him having them.

The occasion of capturing so many wolves and foxes may in large measure be attributed to the generosity of one of our neighbors. When he moved onto his claim he brought along an old blind horse, "Old Bill." The poor fellow was about ready to die of old age. One day the man told the boys they might have "Old Bill," if they liked to go and get him. I rather suspected that he was afraid the horse would die on his hands, and that he would have the trouble to drag him off somewhere out of the way. But the boys thought that it would be a grand thing to have a real horse, all their own, and in a moment they were in an ecstasy of delight; and there was no peace till I gave my consent for them to go and get the poor old chap. Our neighbor told them that if they would give him plenty of hay he would make a good riding-horse, and would be just the thing for them. I could see, of course, that I would be minus the hay and have the extra work of drawing off in the bargain. When the boys brought him home they gave him enough hay for two big horses in robust health. They patted and stroked and made a great fuss over him, and I expected nothing else than that he would die suddenly from too big a dose of kindness administered all at one time. "He's been a splendid horse in his time, I'll warrant you!" one would say. "Yes," said another; "if he was only about five years old, now would n't he make a fine riding-horse!" And so they would talk and spend a good deal of time over him the little while they

were the owners of a real, live horse; though blind in both eyes, somewhat under the age of Methusaleh, and not a tooth in his head. It seemed, however, that he retained well the faculty of hearing; for the old fellow would stop munching his hay every now and then, and prick up his ears, and appeared to be taking in every admiring word they uttered.

Whether it was as I had predicted, I am not quite sure; it may be though, as I have hinted before, that he was too old to live any longer; for the next morning, or the morning following, we found poor "Old Bill" lying there as stiff and motionless as a log—not a spark of life left in him. So we tied a rope around his neck, and drew him across the ravine into a hollow.

At night we could hear the wolves and foxes yelping and howling and making the most hideous noises, as though there might be half a hundred of them, by the noise they made. They were not long finding "Old Bill's" remains, and made a great feast whilst it lasted. Seeing what was going on, we borrowed a couple of steel traps and set them close up to the carcass, and the result was two wolves and six or seven foxes.

There used to be a good many deer and elks and other large game in the country the first few years, and they would come very near to the house. I remember one beautifully warm morning in springtime, the boys and I were hunting for wood on the bank of the ravine, when we espied two big, fat deer lying asleep in the bottom of the ravine. Falling back stealthily, I ran home to get the old shotgun. When I got back, I very cautiously crept up to the edge of the ravine and peered over the bank; there they lay in just the same position. I suppose that I was a little excited, for I had never

been so near to a deer before, except the large herds of beautifully-marked and spotted tame deer in the noblemen's parks in England. So in cocking the gun, the very slight clicking aroused them, and pricking their ears, they were on their feet and up out of the ravine and bounding across the prairie almost before I could raise the gun. Without taking aim, I sent some shots after them; but they took no notice of it, and on they sped up over the hills and out of sight in a few moments.

There were also immense herds of buffalo on the Western plains—millions of them. And it was said that, for the paltry sum of one dollar for each robe, hunters killed these animals by the thousands, and left their carcasses bleaching on the plains. The building and opening up of the Union Pacific Railroad cut the great herd in two, and after that they were known as the northern and southern herds. At the time of our entry into the new country the southern herd alone, which was the larger of the two, was estimated to number over four million animals.

When the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad was completed—so the report ran—the rush to the plains to kill buffaloes was almost as exciting as the famous travel to the California mines in the fifties. Thousands of Eastern hunters joined the throng, and the wanton killing of the southern herd proceeded at a rate never before witnessed in any country. Only three years before, in 1873, one railroad alone carried from the plains two hundred and fifty thousand robes, two hundred million pounds of meat, and three hundred thousand pounds of bones. And only two years later the vast southern herd, with the exception of a few thousand animals that escaped below the Picos River, was practically exterminated.

The northern herd escaped destruction a few years longer on account of the lack of means to reach them. But when the Northern Pacific Railroad was put through, in 1882, the rush began to the region between the Platte Valley and the Great Lake. As the hides had now advanced to three dollars apiece, in a short time the hunters' camps practically surrounded the herd on every side, so that it was impossible for any of the beasts to escape. Fully ten thousand hunters, it is said, were in the field; and those on one side drove the frightened animals to the camps of those on the opposite sides. Back and forth they went, running directly into the muzzles of thousands of repeating rifles whichever way they turned. The last of the immense herd, numbering about seventy-five thousand, crossed the Yellowstone in 1883, bound for the Dominion of Canada; but a host of hunters were at their heels, and not more than five thousand of them crossed into British territory.

As in previous years, no great number of settlers came in during this year (1876), the country settling up very slowly in comparison with many other countries newly opened—especially since that time. Just a few business and professional men came into the little town, however, and amongst them was a young lawyer—quite a gifted young fellow. Doubtless he would have reached a high mark in his profession had it not been for that habit which carries so many thousands down to ruin, and then destroys their souls as well as their bodies. His recognized ability and pleasing manner brought to him friends, and there were many who regretted to see him going the down-grade, and wished that he might put on the brake and stay himself from dashing headlong over the precipice into the abyss below.

There was another young lawyer, also, who came in about this time. Later on he took possession of and ran the *Boone County Argus*. He, too, like the other young lawyer spoken of, went overboard from the same cause. Eight or nine instances are brought to my mind right there in the community, of whom only two or three had reached middle age, who, in the course of a few years, went down from this same life-destroying agent—that great curse that men have made to themselves the wide world over; some of them under its influence, and pleading for more, whilst gasping the last breath.

A young doctor was also among the newcomers. He had his office in the garret up over the old store. There was no ceiling or finishing; simply the rafters and boards overhead, with numerous holes and cracks between the shingles—good places through which to count the stars as the doctor lay there musing. I was up in that garret once, I remember, and I have never had the least inclination to go there again—on the same errand, I mean; for the doctor and I have always been the best of friends. I recollect the circumstance so well that I could n't forget if I tried.

I had been suffering intensely with neuralgia in my head and face for several weeks, the result of a decayed tooth, and was like some old, toughened war veterans that a dentist was one day telling me about. "When in action on the field," said he, "they could stand before the open mouth of an eighty-ton gun, and its discharge would n't even make them wink; but somehow they—some of them, at least—seem to have such a dread of having a tooth pulled that when I tell them to sit in a chair, and I get out my instruments, they at once turn

pale, and seem as though they would slink out of the room if they could do so without my seeing them."

Something of that sort ailed me, I presume, for I kept putting it off from time to time; till one day, feeling that I could bear it no longer, I fully determined to have that tooth taken out whatever the consequence. When I got down town, I was not long telling the doctor what I wanted, and we went at once up to his "operating-room." We had been there only a few minutes, when up came "Doc" Johnson. He, I suppose, was anxious to learn what he could, and so came up to witness the performance. The doctor told me to sit in a chair and put my head back. So I sat down, and hung my head over the hard, narrow rail of a common, forty-cent chair—something after the fashion I used to see poor little calves, innocent as they were, carried to market, or to the slaughter-house, when I was a little boy, their heads hanging down over the end of the cart.

When he had fastened the instrument securely on the tooth—as he supposed, at least—he pulled with all his might. I stuck fast to the chair as long as I could; but finding that the chair and I must part company if something didn't pretty soon break loose, it seemed that the instrument took the hint, and some way managed to free itself from my tooth. Fortunately for the doctor, he was pretty close up to the side of the building, and this no doubt saved him from falling as flat as a flounder on his back, and at the same time saved me from being sued for damages for a cracked or broken skull. For when the instrument broke loose, the doctor went back with a tremendous thump, his head striking the rafters in the slanting roof. However, if I was not daunted,

why should he be? So at it he went again, trying the same tactics; but away it went again. The next time he had a firmer hold, and lifted me from the chair and then let me back again in a manner not exactly in harmony with my tender feelings. This was repeated two or three times, when Johnson, who stood near by witnessing the tragedy, came to my aid. Placing his two hands on my shoulders, he held me down whilst the doctor, in a tug-of-war kind of fashion, went on with the third act. Pretty soon I discovered myself saying, "O! O!" whilst my mouth was filled with blood and water, and big raindrops chased one another down my cheeks. Finally in some way, I couldn't tell how, the job was accomplished, and, paying the doctor for his kindly treatment, I was soon on my way home, with my handkerchief pressed firmly against my face. Who, then, will dare say I have not reason to keep the doctor so well in remembrance all these years?

When Johnson met me a few days later, he spoke about the tooth-pulling, and said, "I see you've got your head on still; if you've got nerve enough to be snaked around in that fashion, you could stand having your head twisted off, as chickens' heads are, and you would n't know it." "Well," said I, "if ever such a thing as that does happen, I should very much prefer not to know it, but to be utterly unconscious of what was going on."

If I had been as unscrupulous in regard to the correctness of my statements relating to the country as some whom I knew, I might easily have helped a little towards settling up the country faster than it did. Some whom I knew were allured by misrepresentation, and on their arrival, if they were not actually disgusted, they felt that they had been a good deal deceived; and as soon

as they were able—some of them, at least—after risking the perils of the ocean, returned to their old homes by the quickest route. Others remained for the simple reason that they had to, as we sometimes say. But if they had been aware of the years of hardship and privation ahead of them, they certainly would never have dreamed of leaving good situations and comfortable and pleasant homes to come out here onto these Western prairies.

I would not speak a single word in disparagement of persons coming in an settling up these new countries. For no one who knows anything about it would think for a moment of denying that thousands of comfortable homes have been built up on these wild wastes. But my strong plea is, don't deceive; give people the exact knowledge, as far as possible, of the actual condition of things. Deception is lying, no matter from what position you view it.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Christmas-Time in The Old Soddy

IN glancing back over the incidents which contribute to make up this narrative to that delightful June morning when we whirled out of London on an "express train" it seems to me now a long way in the rear, that a much longer time has elapsed since the dawn of that day. Numerous events have been briefly reviewed. It is not so much, however, for what has been said as for the much more that has passed through my mind but has remained unwritten that makes the time seem so long. But time speeds away fast; and if all should be told it could hardly be realized that so much of life could be crowded into such a short period. But what makes the time seem so long, there has been such a preponderance of one kind, and that the harder side of life. When everything along the pathway is bright and cheery time seems to take to herself wings, and fairly flies away.

We had hardly expected to bid adieu to the reader so soon and so abruptly; but too much of anything taken at one time, even the matter of composing a book, may become wearisome. But ere we part company let us take a peep once more within the walls of the old soddy, for we are reminded that it is Christmas, and the old year has yet but a few more days to linger, and will then die naturally of old age.

There is nothing about the dusky-looking appartement

pertaining to, or even indicating, elegance, except it be that mite of a "sunbeam" lying there on the old lounge snugly wrapped about in the softest and warmest material that can be found. A couple of chairs with their very straight and stiff backs are standing close up in front of it, with a determined effort to keep the mite of a "beam" from rolling off onto the floor. No rich, dark-green laurel and holly and ivy with enameled leaf, or the dainty and fragile mistletoe with its snow-white berries decks the walls everywhere about, as in days of yore. The stove, however, has been brought in from the little room some weeks past. For though people have been persisting in calling it "fall" up to within two or three days; and then one day, all of a sudden, said that winter was here; unless we were badly deceived it seemed that we had had already several weeks of severe winter. Fuel was not in abundance; for being without a team till within the last two or three weeks we were put back a good deal in getting up wood for winter. However, we always managed not alone to keep from freezing, but to be comfortably warm. When we built the house we had it in mind to make it as warm as we possibly could. Neighbors, one especially, in very cold weather would say: "I'll have to come up to your house and get myself warm." That ancient-looking sack-of-wheat-chair, too, it had been necessary to tear to pieces and have a portion of it ground up, and we were then subsisting on it. We regretted very much to eat up that old chair; but as life depended on it there seemed no way to avoid it.

But our attention is being diverted by these other matters, and were it not for the rumbling and bubbling of the "Old English" plum pudding in the iron kettle there on the stove we would be almost forgetting that it is Christ-

mas. It had been doing that very same thing the day before, and away into the night. It was placed there early again this morning, as soon as the kettle could be made clean from the cornmeal-mush that clung so tenaciously about it after the first meal of the day. It was absolutely necessary in order that it become a real, genuine plum-pudding that it be subjected to this process of severe and protracted scalding. For that was the custom; and custom, in this instance especially, played a great part in making it what it was.

In England people would sometimes make several, and boil them perhaps two or three days, then tie them up in a cloth tightly, and hang them up and keep them for weeks and months, and even till Christmas came again, when they would be "hotted up" and be quite new.

The kettle needed to be replenished many times during the day with fresh supplies of boiling water from the teakettle, which nestled close by its side, singing all the day long and sending forth music as from an æolian as the steam puffed out and ascended in clouds, and was lost in the old hay and brush overhead. The pudding is not so rich with fruit and other nice things as we have been wont to have them in other days, but we call it a plum pudding all the same. "What's in a name!" A great deal more sometimes than people are disposed to ascribe to it. And so it was with us on this occasion; the name served to fill up a wide gap caused by the deficiencies in other ways. We have no guests, however, being all by ourselves; and nobody else knows anything about its richness or its poorness, so we make ourselves content and are thankful that we have something that we may call a plum pudding.

But more than that. Open the oven door and just .

take a peep in there, will you, and see that fine, fat turkey! With a good, hot fire and oft-repeated basting with the rich oil that is sizzling and oozing in little bubbles it is putting on a fine, crusted brown, and will soon be ready for the table, as we also are.

Edgar had told his cousins in that letter of his just two weeks and a day before that we had eighty chickens and twelve nice, fat turkeys. And as there was only one Christmas during the whole year we rather felt as though we must take the risk upon ourselves and have one of these turkeys for our own table. The minister had also been remembered with one, as he had been the Christmas before. It was not an easy thing for us to do, though; and there was a kind of feeling creeping all over us that we might be cheating our creditors out of the price of a turkey, though they knew not whether we had many turkeys or none. But this was no mean occasion; but the contrary, a memorable one—one on which we could afford to feast and make merry as far as circumstances would permit; a time commemorative of the greatest event the world had ever witnessed. Why then should not our hearts be made glad!

But we are already seated around the old table which was so shattered by the roof falling in upon it nearly four years before; but it has been made sufficiently strong to bear up the turkey, and the plum pudding also. But the pudding, of course, must remain there on the stove bubbling away till the very last moment, when it shall be needed; for it must come upon the table all steaming hot.

After satisfying our desire for turkey and mashed potatoes, with nice, rich brown gravy poured over them, the pudding, which is in a good-sized bowl (basin, as we would call it in England) tied over at the top with a

cloth, is carefully lifted from the kettle with a couple of forks, turned bottom-side up and shaken out onto a large-sized plate. Here we are at a loss, and can think of no substitute for the holly-twigs with which to adorn it. Neither had we any brandy to pour over it and set light to, and watch the blue flames as they would flicker and dance around and over from one side to the other. But this, with the brandy-sauce and all else of a similar nature, we had long since learned to dispense with totally. In place of these, however, a little granulated sugar—just a little for the occasion: it was a rare thing to see white sugar—is sprinkled over it, and a few colored candies placed on top, and the decking is complete. A mixture of cornstarch and milk, or water, with a little lemon and spices cooked on the stove and poured over the good, fat slices of pudding takes the place of the brandy-sauce, and it is all that could be wished for. The admonition from their mother, which I had heard in other days that had past, "Now, you children, be very careful, and do n't eat too much of this pudding; for it is very rich, and it might make you ill," was either forgotten or it was thought, considering the nature and quality of the ingredients, that there was no necessity for cautioning them for the same reason on this occasion.

Dinner being over, and the table cleared, the afternoon and evening were spent in the most agreeable and pleasant way the ingenuity of the boys could devise; not a few times now and again snatching a moment from their amusement to pay an admiring glance and a few words to the "beam" that was reflecting its bright light on all and upon everything about, and then off again.

No unnecessary labor of any kind was done; simply at-

tending to the cattle and doing only such things as actually needed daily care and attention. For we had been accustomed, as all England was, to observe the day with a good deal of sacredness. All business being suspended, and services held in all the churches in the morning, as on Sundays. And why not, when we consider the significance of the event it commemorates!

Dinner, as was always the case on similar occasions, was later than usual; and having satisfied our appetites so abundantly then, when supper-time came we were not in a condition to crave either turkey or plum-pudding, but were content to take just a "little bite" shortly before going to bed.

After the boys had filled themselves with such fun as the circumstances and an old sod house would afford, and when the chores were all done, we all gathered around the stove as it was being fed at short intervals from the wood piled up between the stove and the wall; for, as on Sundays, fuel had been brought in the night before to suffice for the day's burning, so that as little as possible of what would have the appearance of work might be done on that day. For we tried as best we could to observe the command, "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do *all* thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt *not* do *any* work, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day and hallowed it."

The weather outside is what people call "bitter cold;"

yet, by huddling around the stove and almost continually cramming it with fresh supplies of food which it devours and swallows apparently almost whole, freezing and we are kept a reasonable distance apart.

We had been accustomed in England on cold winter-evenings—we hardly knew what the word “cold” meant in comparison with what we were then experiencing—to sit in front of the cheery open fire, with no other light than that radiating from its glowing brightness, shedding its rays and illuminating every nook and corner of the neatly and comfortably furnished room. We would sit there watching with considerable delight, the older as well as the younger, various and almost numberless objects in the glowing coals, appearing for a few moments, then disappearing and making way for others. First, perhaps, would be the very “Old Father Christmas” himself, with long, snowy beard and flowing locks, which told of his age, trudging along with a pack at his back filled with all kinds of gifts to make glad the hearts of the children; shaking them by the hand and saying good-bye, as in a few days he was going to his long home.

Then would appear some great warrior, clad in steel armor, and mounted upon his noble, prancing steed. It seemed we could almost hear the clanging of his sheathed sword as it dangled there by his side.

Then again some old turreted castle, or massive cathedral with its numerous pointed spires and rich architectural adornings; and the sound of the merry chimes as they rang out over the still, clear air seemed almost to come right into our ears.

And now again the face of one we must certainly have seen before, for from the glow of heat his lips are moving, and he must be talking to us.

And so a continual and momentary change of scene would be going on right there in the glowing coals, helping perhaps to divert our thoughts from some things not well to brood over, and enabling us to pass the time more pleasantly.

Our stove was one of the "Hawk Eye" pattern, and though only a kitchen-stove, was furnished with two eyes, as it were, in which was inserted plates of isinglass, and through which the light shined and cast its bright rays across the dark room. This gave the room a more cheery appearance. There may be warmth equally as much, but there seems nothing to cheer sitting around a stove where not a single ray of light is emitted; the gloom makes one feel cold. The later improved parlor and heating stoves, with their windows all around, are a great boon in that respect.

So then these "hawkeyes" served in a small degree to compensate for the absence of the open fireplace. After talking over the good time had in the schoolhouse downtown the evening before, when the Sunday-school, the Church, and everybody alike in a pioneer-fashion enjoyed a share, we fell into a kind of reverie. As we sat there quietly talking our thoughts drifted back to other days that had more of cheer in them. And in our imagination we could see over again these strange pictures so plainly depicted in the red-hot coals as just now described. The boys, the two eldest at least—for Leonard being so young when we left London had little or no recollection of anything—compared the present and the years that had passed since our arrival in this country with former times.

"Do n't you remember when we used to go down the streets to see the shops all lit up with a blaze of light; and the windows set out so nice! And the butchers' shops,

too, with rows and rows of great, fat bullocks hanging there whole, with holly just thick with red berries stuck about all over them like as if they were in a bowery!"

"Yes, and the little pudgy, sucking pigs, too; with their tails pinned up over their backs, as they squatted there in the window all in a row it seemed as though they were going to bark at you. And the turkeys and the geese at the poultreter's, and all that!"

"Yes; but I'll tell you what I used to like, and that was when father used to take us out for a walk to see the different things and places; the British Museum, and around Westminster Abbey and St. James's Park to see the soldiers, and hear their splendid band play!"

"And don't you know when we got home at night we used to go down Pitfield Street and Hoxton Market with mother and buy apples and nuts for Christmas; for you know we never used to buy anything that day, 'cause it was like Sunday, do n't you know?"

And so they would talk and review a little of what they remembered of former years, whilst their mother and I sat quietly listening. Why was it, I wonder, that we were so quiet, leaving all the talking to the boys! Were we, too, inaudibly and only in our own minds reviewing these same times of which they had been talking, and which, looking into the fire through the "hawkeyes" occasionally, they had brought back to our minds?

But the silence is now broken; she may have had a slight suspicion, or fear, lest there might be a little tinge of murmuring or complaining in the tone of their utterances on account of the less bright condition of present circumstances.

So their mother does not forget to remind them, and us all, in her gentle way of the bountiful supply of nice

things on which we had that day feasted. "We ought to be very thankful to God for the good things we have had to-day; we are apt to think our lot a hard one sometimes, but there are thousands of poor creatures, I dare say, who have not had anything or scarcely anything to eat to-day. How thankful they would be if they had only half as much as we have had! How happy I should be, if I were able and had the means, to help the thousands who may be hungering and perhaps starving for the want of food. I can hardly think it would be as it is if so many who have much more than they can rightly use for their own comfort would make use of their idle thousands to feed and otherwise assist the worthy poor. And especially, so I think, if so many who seem to like to be called Christians would act more in accordance with the wishes of the One whom they profess to love and to imitate. It's a wonder to me they do not think more about these things, especially at such a time as this, when we are commemorating the birth of the Savior of mankind, he who not alone fed the multitudinous thousands with bread when they might otherwise have suffered, but even gave his own life that the lives of others might be saved!"

And thus she would talk as we sat there by the stove, the light flickering through the "hawkeyes," and listening in silence, with only a word now and then from one or another in affirmation and approval of her utterances.

A thought comes to me now that I do not remember has ever come to me before, and that is this: With all the hardships and privations that we endured, I am not aware of the boys ever complaining of their lot. They may, of course, as would be only natural, have had desires for something better or more agreeable and pleasant. But they always endeavored to turn everything to the

best account, never exhibiting a spirit of discontent. Their whole ambition—all of them, from the oldest to the youngest, was to work our way out and up the best and quickest way possible, bending all their energies, together with my own, toward that end.

One time, I remember, when times seemed pretty hard, there being little or nothing but bread in the house; it was near the time for dinner, and Leonard, seeing that no preparations were being made for the noon meal, said to his mother, "Mother, what are we going to have for dinner?" "Why, bread and *pull it*, I suppose; we have n't anything else!" was the reply. So when the time came and she gave him a piece of bread before the rest of us came in, he wanted to know where the *pullet* was. "Why," said his mother to him again, "I've given you your bread; now you must *pull it!*" Leonard, looking at his mother with somewhat of surprise, and still more of disappointment, said, "Why, that ain't *pullet!*" "Yes; that's the kind we always have when we have n't the other; you must hold your bread in one hand, and pull it with the other, and that will be all right. We ought to be very thankful we have that; for it would be worse if we had none." Leonard all the time looking his mother in the face in a bewildered kind of way, as though a good deal puzzled to understand what it all meant. But his mother being unable any longer to hold herself, let a little smile flicker over her face, and Leonard began then to unravel the mysterious joke, and turned away with something between a smile and a laugh. He no doubt felt the disappointment, but made no complaint.

When the rest of us came in from the field to get our

dinner of "bread and pull it," his mother related to us the little farce that she and Leonard had been enacting all by themselves, when the old sod walls were made to ring again from all around. But Leonard was not to be outdone; for though he had been the victim of his mother's happy nature for innocent fun, he did his full part trying to raise the roof. But that was a little more than our combined effort of lung power could manage. It was not a bad thing, after all, for it seemed to wash down the dry "bread and pull it;" and when it was all over, I don't know but what we went out again to our work with as lively a spirit and as good a will—and maybe more so—than if we had feasted on turkey and plum pudding of the richest. I think, too, as was often the case on similar occasions, we had to give Leonard's mother credit for the greater share of the happy conclusion that came out of it.

Little incidents like these often contain very much more than we may be able to see in them at the time. Not only do they serve the time and place of their origin, but they are adapted for future use. They are capable of being brought out years hence, dusted off, and made to do duty over and over again, and yet lose little of their vitality. And so it is with this little episode, it has kept moving on down with the years, and still abides in the home. If it could be possible that all the rest should forget it, the victim himself will never do so. And when that original half smile, half laugh, is seen playing over his face, the question is asked, "Now, what are you going to laugh about?" And when the old tale is once more told, it is again new; and the cheery, healthful laugh—though the volume of power has sadly dimin-

ished—that originated in the old sod shanty away out on the prairie more than a quarter of a century ago is here with us and doing duty to-day.

I have spent many sleepless nights thinking and puzzling my brain to devise means whereby little debts might be met; when none but myself partook of my thoughts and feelings. But when one is conscious of having exhausted every honest means in his power to fulfill a duty, or to discharge an obligation, there is no benefit derived by worrying and fretting, and making life not only a misery to one's self, but to others with whom one mingles. To indulge in such a mood tends only to aggravate and deepen, rather than alleviate the trouble. And so it is, if a good, sound, hearty laugh can be started on its way occasionally, and end up in a full, grand chorus by every member of the household, much of that which tends to gloom and darkness, and sometimes renders a person scarcely companionable, is checked; or, at least, it is kept under the surface where others may not see it, and its contaminating and evil influence is kept in abeyance.

It is said that among the minor benefits of life there is no greater benison than the blessing of a bright face. "That is the brightest and most beautiful face through which shines the purest soul." That being so, we need seek no further for an explanation of the remark so often heard, as friends are looking down upon the photographed likeness resting there on the little easel on the center-table, spoken in whispered tones one to another, "What a beautiful face!"

But we have had quite a long talk to-night, and are up later than usual; and what with the extra cooking and trying to keep ourselves warm, the stack of wood which

was piled up behind the stove last night, three or four feet high, is making its way rapidly near to the floor. The weather has been severe all day, but it is going to be intensely cold to-night. The windows, except the one almost close to the stove, have been thick with frost all day, so that we could not see out; the children engraving on them with their finger-nails the most grotesque figures that they could imagine. But now it is gathering on this one also, which indicates what a bitter night it is going to be. The boys go outside for a minute, and return shrugging their shoulders and rubbing their hands as they haste to get near the stove, saying: "It's going to be a stinger to-night, I tell you! How would you like it, Edgar, if you and father were out on the road to-night?" "I would n't think it very nice; but, I 'll tell you, we 've been out creeping along with the old oxen when it 's been quite as cold as this, and more disagreeable, too! When we 're out, we have to put up with it; there 's no other way. But, I tell you, it feels nice after we 've been out on the road all day, and almost frozen through"—this with a shrug and a shiver—"to get home again by the side of a good, hot stove!"

It could be seen, their mother had been noticing very closely what the boys had said about the coldness of the night, and was in deep thought again. And although she had before intimated that it was getting late, and that we must soon see about getting to bed, it seemed that she could not refrain from speaking again about "so many poor creatures who may be out in the cold, and have no warm, comfortable home as we have." "They have my pity and sympathy, and that 's all I 'm able to give, except my prayers!"

But we must not stay up any longer. So the Bible

is taken from its accustomed place on the little narrow shelf in the corner—a piece of common board resting on a couple of wooden pegs driven into the dirt wall—that same little Book which is such a close companion of its owner, and which receives her attention many times during the day. The sacred Book is handed to Edgar to read a portion. Turning the leaves till he comes to the second chapter of St. Matthew, he reads: "Now, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold! there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." Continuing on, he comes to where it says, "They saw the young child with his mother." Then his further reading is interrupted by his mother, who feels right here that she must make comparison. "Yes," she said; "only think! Jesus, God's own Son, born a humble babe, with not even so much as an old home-made cot on which to lay him, as our own little 'beam' has, lying there so snug and so warm; but was laid amidst the hay in a manger! He had the power to have things all so differently if he would; but he did it all on account of the infinite love he had for us. How much we ought to try and please him!"

Then kneeling, and resting our heads upon the old lounge on which lay the innocent, sleeping babe, the simplest but most fervent prayer found its way up through the old matted hay and brushwood, still ascending, up through the tons upon tons of dirt that composed the roof, to the Heavenly Father above. Then, as was our wont, closing by all repeating the Lord's Prayer. And when we said, "Give us this day our daily bread," we felt indeed that our Heavenly Father had been more

than good to us that day, and had given us, if not more than our share, more perhaps than we deserved.

Now cramming the stove with wood, and shutting off all the draught, so as to hold the heat the longer, we all snuggled down in bed; having first spread over them anything and everything that would serve for a covering and help to keep us warm. The light flickered through the "hawkeyes" for quite a while after, and the last words uttered after everything was comfortably arranged and the light had gone out, came in a muffled sound from beneath the covering: "Another Christmas is over! I wonder what the next one will bring?" And then, after a brief pause, "Thank God! we've got a good bed to lie down upon; for there are so many poor creatures who have nowhere to lay their heads this bitter cold night!" Then all was still.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

The Sequel

IN former chapters the reader has been told about the little child who used to ask so many strange questions; questions that the philosopher and the theologian might not answer. We have seen the little fellow standing there with his back against the mud-plastered walls of the old sod house on the plains, with his hands flying, and preaching to us his most enthusiastic child-sermons. We have seen him, too, out there in the hills all alone watching, and giving good care to his little herd of cattle; and at the same time, in the full glare of the scorching sun, or under the black cloud of the threatening storm, poring over a few of the shattered pages that he has asked leave that he might take from his mother's much dilapidated little Bible—dilapidated, all on account of the daily and hourly service that it had rendered to its owner.

The reader has also been told of the ardent desire cherished by his mother, that some day one at least of her children might become a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it has also been hinted that we might perhaps by and by see if there were any signs or indications that these ardent longings might some day be gratified. But with the closing of the preceding chapter, when the last faint flicker of light from the two hawk-eyes darted across the dark room and all was still, we thought then that we had pulled down the curtain so

closely, and had shut out the whole scene so securely that it would never again be opened to the light. And for that reason we will beg the reader's pardon if for another brief moment we may be allowed to raise the curtain for a last look.

Twenty long years have winged their flight since those last words that in muffled tones found their way out from under the covering that bitterly cold Christmas night, "Another Christmas has gone; I wonder what the next one will bring?" But after the lapse of all these years we lift the veil for a moment; and what now do we see? The one whom we saw once as a child has come up through boyhood and youth, and is now a young man. He is standing before a very attentive and sympathetic audience that fills the little "Kilpatrick" Congregational church. It is the month of February, the second day; and the year is 1896. And instead of the innocent child-sermons of a quarter of a century before, in loving remembrance of his mother—and to him, as he thinks, the best mother that ever lived in all the wide world—who, by tender hands had been laid away to rest seven weeks before, to "sleep till that morning," he is delivering a memorial sermon. And here I will bid the reader adieu, and leave the young preacher to close the chapter, by telling his own story of his beloved mother in his own words and in his own way.

THE SERMON

"For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For verily in this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven; if so be that being clothed, we shall not be found naked. For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but that we would be clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life. Now he

that wrought us for this very thing is God, who gave us the earnest of the Spirit. Being therefore always of good courage, and knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (for we walk by faith, not by sight); we are of good courage, I say, and are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord. Wherefore also we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well pleasing unto him.”¹

What a wonderful book is the Bible! What a blessing it is to know it, to have one’s mind stored with its deep truths and precious promises! At no other time do we more vividly realize this than when some great sorrow or heavy loss is visited upon us. Then one after another these verses flit across our memory like angels of mercy and harbingers of hope. New light is thrown on God’s Word. Passages oft studied before reveal to our aching hearts profounder meaning, and cast athwart our darkened pathway brighter gleams of light. Our griefs become the way to hidden wells of refreshment ever up-springing from the heart of God. Heaven pity him who, in the hour of adversity or affliction, has not this source of comfort and sustaining power!

This is no unverified theory. I know it from my own experience. In the great sorrow of our recent loss peace and comfort spring up fresh from God’s Word. That which had been such a real, living, sparkling fountain of perpetual blessing to her who has gone, revealed its depths of meaning and consolation to us who were left. While the lifeless form lay cold and still before us, these verses, long since familiar, came back with wonderful effect. It was no feigned welcome that our burdened hearts accorded them. They came as messengers of heaven. It was as though gloom had settled down upon

¹ 2 Cor. v, 1-9, R. V.

us, darkening into night, the natural sun hidden behind black clouds, and we left to grope alone, when suddenly above us burst into full blaze a star far brighter than the sun with light Divine, and then while we gazed in grateful hope another and another, till all the firmament was illumined, and the lowly path of life became a line of gold, leading straight to the gates of heaven. Surely

“The path of the righteous is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”²

And then we knew the meaning of that verse:

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”³

So they continued to come, the inquiring words of Job, longing for more light on the great question of immortality:

“If a man die, shall he live again?”⁴

And later a gleam of hope, and assurance flashes out bright from the seeming gloom and uncertainty surrounding him:

“I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand up at last upon the earth: and after my skin hath been thus destroyed, yet from my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.”⁵

Then that most precious, comforting, assuring psalm of the shepherd of Israel, that has lighted and cheered the way for more tempted, troubled, wearied, and dying souls than any other Scripture possibly:

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”⁶

²Prov. iv, 18.

³Psa. cxix, 105.

⁴Job xiv, 14.

⁵Job xix, 25.

⁶Psa. xxiii, 4.

The mighty faith of prophetic vision :

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee : because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord forever : for in the Lord Jehovah is an everlasting rock."⁷

The promises of our Savior, especially his last words to his disciples : "Let not your heart be troubled ; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions ; if it were not so I would have told you ; for I go to prepare a place for you,"⁸ and so through the whole passage. The triumphs of faith, vividly portrayed in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews ; the resurrection chapter of St. Paul, in which he reaches the first main climax in the discussion, when he exultantly exclaims, "But now has Christ been raised from the dead, the first fruits of them that are asleep."⁹ Then notice how he proceeds from one lofty crag to another of that mighty argument till he closes with one great, triumphant shout, "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁰ What an anchor to the soul, reaching to that which is within the veil !

Yet of all the passages of Holy Writ recurring to my mind at this time, none seem so impressive, appropriate, and applicable as the one I have read, "For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved." There is nothing more certain on this earth than such dissolution. "The earthly house of our tabernacle" is a frail affair, after all. It is very evident that it is not intended to last always. Sooner or later the end must come, the time when our powers are spent, our work finished, our time run, and the vital spark of life quenched ; when friends

⁷ Isa. xxvi, 3, 4.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. xv, 57.

⁸ John xiv, 1, 2.

⁹ 1 Cor. xv, 20.

and fellow mortals gather around and in subdued tones shall say, "He is dead," and the scenes that knew us once shall know us no more forever. This life must be yielded up, "the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit return to God who gave it."¹¹ All come to it, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the weak and the mighty, the robust and the frail, the young and the old; all depart, one by one, to that place whence there is no returning, "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary be at rest."

Nothing is more glorious than a triumphant death, especially when it crowns a righteous, well-spent life. How beautifully this is seen in the case of the ancient patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, and a host of others, with their flowing white locks, the wrinkles of age, the bent form, and the tottering step, with their great lives behind them, not faultless perchance, but strong, courageous, manly, noble! And as they complete their allotted days they reach the acme of their greatness. And when they come to the last hour, bestow their last blessing, and give the last look, then with solemn dignity close their eyes and are gathered to their fathers, the world comes to realize what they were and to measure their lives:

"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"¹²

But what is death? The answer is found in what it does. When we gaze on the lifeless, motionless form, we know all that it is permitted mortals to know. The departed do not return to tell us the experience of death or to bring tidings of what lies beyond. But we know enough. Already decay has set in. Dissolution has com-

¹¹ Eccl. xii, 7.

¹² Num. xxiii, 10.

menced. The house crumbles. The body returns to dust. Motionless, cold, insensible, shrouded in the robe of death, housed in its narrow casket, we bear it away to the last resting place; silently, solemnly, tenderly, we commit it to the earth. We set up our monuments to mark where we laid it. But the soul—where is it? Where is she who occupied this house? Whose home for a few years of fleeting pleasure and mingled pain it was! Who made it instinct with the mysterious power of life, and showed forth the beauty of the character within! It was she we knew, whom we loved, and whom we will remember; not the clay wasting in yonder city of the dead. The earthly house perishes; but the soul goes on forever. *It does not die.* *It knows no end.* We do not bury *it*.

“Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.”

It is better off. It is released from the limitations and evils, so many and varied, always associated with earthly environment. It has just begun to live; to enter into all the blessed and innumerable and immeasurable possibilities of eternity. O, the power and glory of an endless life!

“When I’ve been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun—”

That is where she is, not “unclothed, but clothed upon;” “death swallowed up in victory.”¹⁸ No doubt about it. “We know”—blessed assurance. The chiefest apostle, St. Paul, closer to the heart of Jesus than any other perchance, who had been “caught up even to the third heaven,” and “heard unspeakable words, which it is

¹⁸ 1 Cor. xv.

not lawful for a man to utter,"¹⁴ was able, in the plentitude of his divine revelations, to say, "*We know,*" and well may we exclaim after him, "*We know!*"

And what is the content of the truth of which we are so sure? "That if the earthly house of our tabernacle"—that is, our material body—"be dissolved," should perish, and return to mother earth, "we have a building from *God*, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," and "so we shall not be found naked." We have a home. A building is provided. It will be a glorious building. We live in a hovel here; but we shall inhabit a palace there. We move out of this crumbling dwelling, and we are escorted by the Son of God himself into a mansion which he has prepared for us, the result of Divine, not human, workmanship, eternal, imperishable, in the heavens. So we are enabled to understand the meaning of St. Paul when he says: "So also is the resurrection; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."¹⁵ With what raptures of unspeakable ecstasy, known only to celestial beings, does the redeemed soul enter into that new home! What a glorious morning bursts upon the heavenly vision! When in olden times, while Christ walked the hills and vales of Palestine, a leper, carrying with him the awful defilement of his living tomb, came to him for healing, a single touch or simple word was sufficient to send new blood coursing through the veins, to put new life into the sunken eyes, to give fresh color to the wan white cheeks, and to plant a new life in the cadaverous form; in short, to raise the living dead to a living, throbbing life. This is but a suggestion of the change from mortality to immortality, of

¹⁴ 2 Cor. xii, 2, 4.

¹⁵ 1 Cor. xv, 42-44.

the welcome accorded the soul to the delectable mountains of paradise. What a contrast will that life and world be to this! Here a decaying, material body, there a glorified, spiritual body; here, weakness, wasting, and death, there, vigor, health, and life. Clothed in perishing garments, surrounded by contaminating influences, feebleness, and fickleness of the flesh here; there embodied in the spotless raiment of heavenly righteousness, in the companionship of angels and the redeemed, with infinite possibilities of highest development as the ages of eternity roll on.

Who can measure or surmise the glorious attainments of the soul in heaven? What wonder that the spirit cries out in irrepressible longing to enter into that life! Contemplate the final effort to reach home, to be freed from pain, to be released from this terrestrial prison-house, and be with the Lord, which is far better. It is St. Paul over again. Have not I beheld it in the case of her of whom I now speak? a sight that angels might weep at! arms outstretched, eyes upturned, anguish indescribable transfigured on every feature, the one cry, repeated over and over, "O, My Father, take me home, let me go home!" Short, terrible, grand! If I may die as she did, I shall be satisfied.

The question arises, Where has she gone? It seems that we might almost pierce the thin veil that intervened. Such are the times when we come near the other world. Yet we should not be too inquisitive. We know all that is necessary; all that is best. So we may rest assured that all is well with us. We, too, must go at the time and in the way appointed. Our turn will come.

"Some day, some time, the boatman gray
O'er death's dark river far away,
Shall guide us into endless day;
Some day, some golden day."

Till then we walk life's mazes alone without her. And we indeed feel alone. We are reminded of an incident occurring over the remains of America's great orator and statesman, Daniel Webster: As the thousands with measured tread and saddened, bedewed faces passing by viewed one by one that form, still nobly dignified, grandly eloquent, though in the embraces of death, one plain appearing man was heard to say, impressively, "Daniel Webster, the world will seem lonely without you." And who is there of whom, when gone, this is not more or less true in the feelings of those who are left? Every near friend, every dear one, whom death calls away takes out of our lives something that can never be quite replaced, and leaves a void in our hearts that no one else can quite fill. It seems to be beautifully arranged of God, in the constitution of our natures, that an empty chamber should remain in our hearts, sacred to the hallowed memory of our loved and gone. And though years fly and time seems to heal the wound, yet now and then, while revisiting the old haunts of long ago, we come across this vacant room, and stand in silence as we contemplate again the varied memories and associations it brings to mind. It is there yet, and always will be, a little dusty and forsaken in appearance possibly, but all the more sacred on that account. But God forbid that these monuments should ever be desecrated or forgotten! Far more eloquent are they than sculptured marble or chiseled granite. Every noble life has them, and they add more than we may ever know to its nobleness. Yes, it is right that we should feel lonely at such times as these. It is our tenderest, most touching tribute to the one who has gone. None of us would care to die bringing no sense of loss and loneliness to some hearts. These sentiments, felt by us who remain, testify

in mute but impressive language to the value of the life that has ceased.

But what is left? We linger about "the earthly house" a few moments, and then consign it to the dust. But what remains to us as a permanent heritage that nothing can despoil? It is not till the record of a life is closed that we can ever fully answer this question. But the principles by which a life is judged and a verdict rendered are plain and simple. That which is the character and history of one instinctively approved of our conscience, commended by our best judgment, and treasured in our hearts, is the pure gold. This alone remains to us through all succeeding years; all else is dross and alloy. This process by which we separate the good from the bad, the real from the fictitious, the genuine from the counterfeit, and the lasting from the transient and vanishing, is "the fire that must try every man's life of what sort it is."¹⁶ It is severe; many suffer much loss in passing through it. All suffer more or less. Yet we may feel that she will stand well the test. Her deeds, example, her inner life and outward services, and the training she gave those intrusted to her nurture, all constitute a priceless legacy of the most enduring value. The flight of time will not diminish it. Her memory will be enshrined in the heart, and gather new luster every passing day. What she was to us all in the past, she will be to us forever; only more. And should it be otherwise?

But I am here to speak of her as mother. In that light all that has been said is allowable; possibly more. But I am aware that this is sacred ground; that it is wisest to say too little than too much; that the best, most precious, and rarest treasures that she leaves are not to be named

¹⁶ 1 Cor. iii, 13.

audibly, nor exhibited to the public gaze; no, nor even handled or analyzed too closely by ourselves. But left, stored away in the secret chambers of the heart, where other eyes never penetrate, they are not to be rudely and coldly precipitated as so many chemical elements, but left in solution in the inner consciousness of the soul, to sweeten and beautify our whole lives.

But not only for this reason do we find it difficult, even impossible, to say what we would of her. Where are the words to express it? Who can adequately define the term even? Where shall we look for its definition? Not in dictionary, or encyclopedia, or in the most glowing and ardent tribute paid her by orator or poet. These do not satisfy us at such times as this. We go to the home itself, see her absorbed in the common duties of the household, maintaining a gentle but firm beneficent rule over her family, yet steadily progressing in all the virtues and sweet services that make saints; a veritable angel of mercy in her day and generation. I go back in memory's beaten path; behold her whom a merciful Providence spared for many years through untold suffering and privations, that we, her children, might have a mother's love and tender care and valued training; see her as she was, as she lived, and served; and that to me is the best, the only satisfying description of the word. It is eloquent, pathetic, beautiful, but not audible. The spoken word does not express it. It can not be transferred to the printed page. And so I leave it where I find it, in the inner recesses of the mind, and let you draw its counterpart in yours. Thus we will understand each other.

Here then, and only here, as queen of the home, do we see what mother is. Hers the sweetest words, the kindest deeds, the greatest services. She smoothes the

way, cheers the heart, brings into life its greatest blessings and supremest joys. "Beareth all things, believeth all things."¹⁷ The first to pity, to forgive, to welcome. The last to condemn, to forsake, to forget. Her self-sacrifice, devotion, and courage partake of the heroic. She exercises the most potent influence. Her life counts for the most far-reaching consequences, for into her hands is committed the sacred duty of molding lives. She shapes eternal destinies. Most great men have had great mothers. A nation is what its mothers are. What a mighty power she wields! Truly,

"The hand that rocks the cradle,
Is the hand that moves the world."

Therefore, how much depends on her character! How doubly important that that hand be prompted and directed by a Christian's heart! And if so, the Christian's crown will be hers at last, and Christ himself shall take that crown, all glittering and sparkling in the light of paradise with jewels of unceasing splendor, and place it on her brow, while angels innumerable chant about the throne a glad welcome home.

We sometimes ask, Is life worth living? Only as we make it so, you and I must answer that question by the way we live and the influence we exert. Do we bring joy and hope and love, faith, Christ, and heaven into the hearts of those about us? Then we make life a constant benediction and an eternal success. And if not, what are we doing, and what is the net result of our lives, measured by the exalted standard of truth, right, and love? Can we be other than accomplices of Satan and agents of perdition? What a power this, with which God has

¹⁷ *I Cor. xiii, 7.*

endowed us! We play on souls and produce the music of heaven or the discord of hell. God throws open before us here the whole keyboard of humanity for us to perform on. Christ alone can show one how to touch those keys and produce the melody of life. He came to earth to attune mortals to the heavenly pitch, and show us the combinations of the universal hymn, and since then man has been more and more discovering the music within, and hastening that time when the "Gloria in Excelsis" of the angels at Christ's birth shall be re-echoed the world around. This is the message that comes to us to-day, a message from God to every one. We are pupils in this school below. Christ is the teacher. He sets us the perfect model. He has bidden us to come and learn of him. He can bring harmony out of discord, set the heart right, breathe peace and tranquillity within, and make our whole lives one great and everlasting doxology.

It is in this connection that her memory will be the dearest and most lasting to us who knew her best. She strove to learn this lesson. How well she did so is not for us to say; God is the judge. But we know what she was. The evidences of a deep, strong, and genuine Christian life were most positive. Not a day passed without its testimony, not only to those of the immediate household, but to all with whom she might chance to come in contact. She feared to own her Christ to no one; yet we believe it can be said without offense to any. With tact impossible to a coarser, less devout nature, she never seemed to lose an opportunity to speak a word of gentle warning or a kindly exhortation to the erring or indifferent. She preached the Word, and preached it effectively, and the Holy Scriptures were her text; not for speaking only, but for living. It was "*the Book*" to her. Accepting it in her

simple, childlike faith, she received therefrom consolation and strength and light that is not and can not be accorded us who think we know more about it, and presume in our human wisdom, it may be, even to estimate its value or judge its merits. It was her life, her spiritual food, her daily allowance from heavenly storehouses of divine sustenance. She lived, not "by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."¹⁸ She was intimately acquainted with Jesus. She was known in heaven. She frequented, God only knows how often, the mercy-seat. She continued instant in prayer. At work, sitting down, on the sick bed, whatever her occupation or lot, the momentary turning aside from busy care, the clasped hands or upturned eyes, told of the silent communion she was holding with her God. Not once in a while only, but so often that we impatiently sometimes thought she prayed all the time, and not being able to understand her religious experience, because we lacked her intense spirituality, we would at times quietly chide her on this habit, only to be answered by a smile or a word. But now, looking back, we see, faintly at least, the explanation of it all. We can not believe that without this constant calling upon her Father for fresh supplies of never-failing grace, she could ever have borne the sad and hard lot meted out to her. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."¹⁹ And for more than a score of years, of mingled suffering and trial, this promise was truly verified. Patience increased as suffering was intensified. Complaints were few; thanksgivings many. Hard, unfeeling criticism she never learned. Conscientious to a fault, she feared to offend any. "With malice toward none and charity for all," tenderhearted to an extreme,

¹⁸ Matt. iv, 4.¹⁹ Deut. xxxiii, 25.

even to weep at the sufferings of dumb creatures. Naturally light-hearted and hopeful, pain or adversity could not daunt her spirit or quench her faith or banish her cheerfulness. "Thank God!" was the most common expression on her lips. Another, so often used by her as to become a household word, "Please God, and nothing happens," attests her humble recognition of dependence on the Omnipotent One. She implicitly trusted his guiding hand. How truly her heart echoed the words of the hymn:

"Lead kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom;
Lead thou, me on."

For all these, and much more, her memory will live and her influence continue.

It may be asked, Why narrate these particulars, common characteristics of many another, and of one never rising from the humble walks of life? To avoid misunderstanding, let me answer: Not because she was better perchance than many not thus memorialized, nor simply by reason of the relationship of mother and son. Many mothers in Israel, blessed souls! have gone the way of all the earth, their excellencies, heroic lives, and noble examples forgotten by the many, too much even by the few, not even a curbstone to mark their resting place. And this is our reason, our apology, if one is necessary. Fame never lacks her herald; worth often goes unsung. Reputation may command the world's vain show and the pomp of wealth; character may not have its funeral cortege. Were intrinsic value of lives and characters the sole consideration, how many books would never have been written; how many of a different type and influence would take their places! Those whose names are written in heaven are surely worthy of a brief, parting notice on

earth. There is too much tendency in this rushing world, in this busy age, to lay away the dead with careless hands, and to suffer the weeds of oblivion to flourish over the graves of the departed; their memory too often dissolves with the returning of their bones to dust. Ought these things so to be? Will not the tender recollections of our loved and gone, treasured up in the heart, prove a blessing and a sweet, ennobling influence to us who linger, rendering us more considerate of friends still spared us? And will it not lead us to a truer estimate of all things entering into life, of this fleeting present, and of the certain oncoming future?

"Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; let me know how frail I am."²⁰

"So teach us to number our days that we may get us a heart of wisdom."²¹

And thus it was with her. Time hastened her along. Each day brought her nearer the end, while it found her better prepared to go. How her soul must have pined for heaven during the last few months and days! It was a school in which she learned to "read her title clear to mansions in the sky." We can never fully know the transformations that took place within as the days of suffering and weary waiting wore away. But as she, often alone, thought it all over, I fancy there was made the final preparation. She was getting ready to go home. As this world was slipping more surely and rapidly from under her, the better world loomed up more radiantly before her. Thither she turned her eyes. And so, while no premonition was probably given, she was ready. The schooling of life was nearly over; the time had come for her to pass beyond. But we did not realize it. Coming nearer heaven,

²⁰ Psa. xxxix, 4.

²¹ Psa. xc, 12.

we did not know it, till the portals of the new Jerusalem swung wide open to receive her. The call came, "Thou art loosed from thine infirmity."²² It is enough; come up higher. It was sudden. Death is always sudden. We could not expect it. We seldom do, just in the way and time it actually comes. But, I thank God! I was permitted to be with her then. Her going, so triumphant, the most sublime sight I ever witnessed! Viewed from the standpoint of our common faith and hope, what a glorious consummation! But I thank God that Christ was there surely; it was he that showed the way. Angels bore her hence. And there in waiting was the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Does some one ask whether it pays to be a Christian, to be permitted to go as she went—but I desist. There is nothing to be compared to it. Suffering, trial, temptation, sink into insignificance before it.

But then to be left behind, alone! But, no; for listen: "It is I; be not afraid;" "I will not leave thee nor forsake thee"—the words of Jesus, walking out on the billows of human trial and sorrow to calm the waves and comfort his own. We felt his presence. The assurance was given that all is well. Our Bethel was set up, and we could say with him of old, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

It is by such experiences that the character is rounded, strengthened, perfected, made meet for the Master's use, and ready to pass beyond when the call comes also to us. And so we are reconciled. Since gazing on her face, so natural, peaceful, and calm, even happy in its expression, as she was and appeared in life, death does not seem so terrible. If the clay once inhabited by the one who has gone can seem so beautiful and expressive, what must be

²² Luke xiii, 12.

the joy and celestial majesty of the soul in glory? The character of the departed spirit is still reflected in the image remaining. What an incentive to gather about that character only those graces and virtues which we are willing to leave imprinted upon this body when we move out!

But we will not linger about the tomb, nor gaze further at the faded face. We will turn heavenward, where changes never come, and behold by faith her real, living self up yonder. It seems hard to give her up. But we did not have to. It is difficult to think of her as dead.

But, thank God! we need not. She lives in the land of the blessed, in the home of the soul, in the presence of the King, to die no more—lives, a link to bind our souls to heaven, a tie connecting two worlds. She shall not return to us, but we shall go to her. She lives to beckon us to join that company, “which,” St. John writes, “when he saw he wished himself among them,” where the re-union of all the redeemed, and the meeting of angels and saints about the throne will fill the New Jerusalem with incense of everlasting joy and praise, while ages roll on in the home of the soul. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them.”²³ “I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.”²⁴

²³ Rev. xiv, 13.

²⁴ Psa. xvii, 15.

